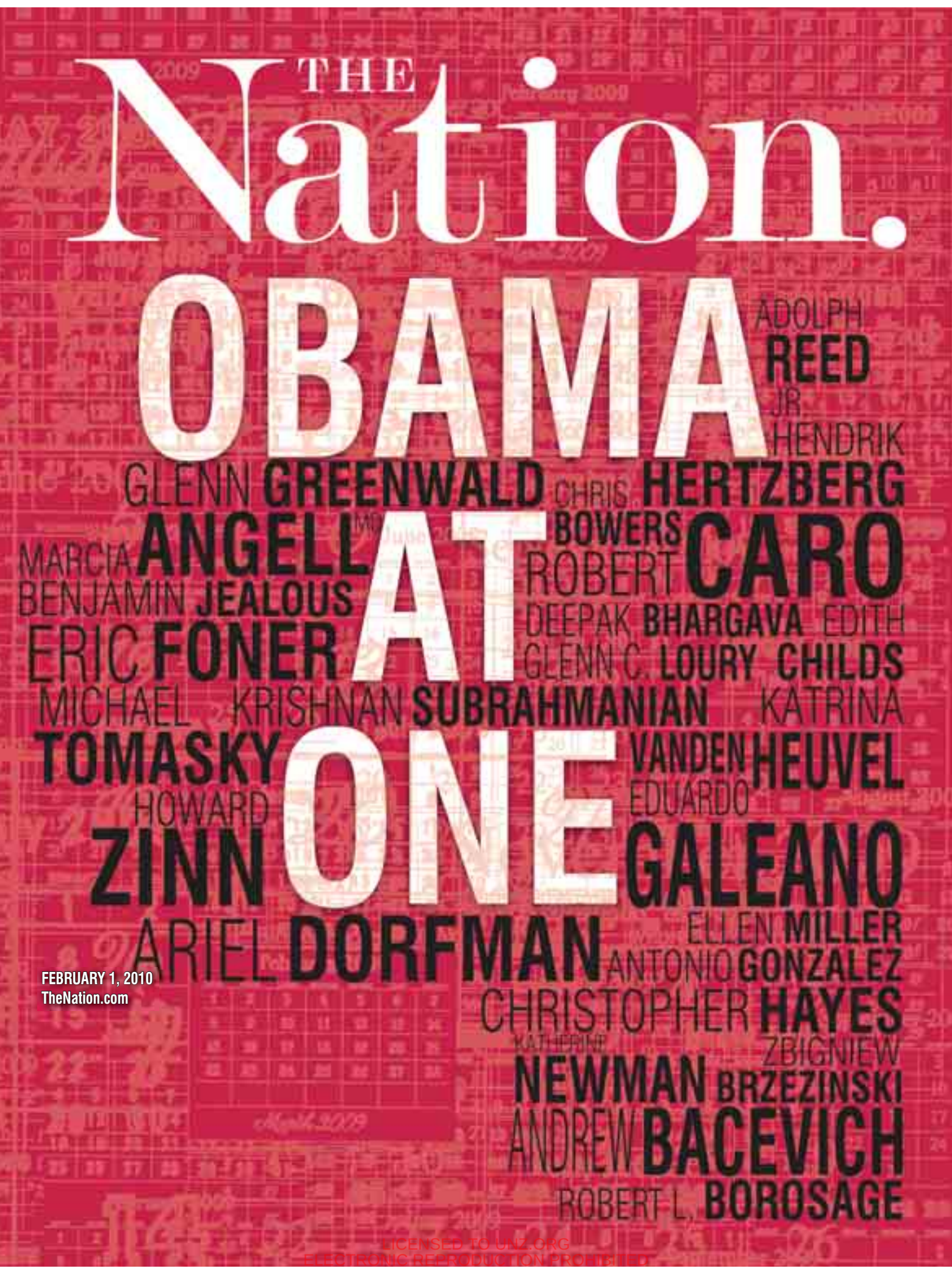

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Letters

SEATTLE 10 YEARS AFTER
THE SECRET US WAR IN PAKISTAN
US SPECIAL FORCES ENLIST BLACKWATER'S HELP ON COVERT OPERATIONS
AN INVESTIGATION BY JEREMY SCAHILL

Flight of the Kestral

WASHINGTON, D.C.

I was US deputy assistant secretary of defense for counternarcotics in the Pentagon from January 2006 to January 2009. I read Jeremy Scahill's "The Secret US War in Pakistan" [Dec. 21/28] and found it to be a regrettable and baseless attack on Kestral Holdings and its distinguished CEO, Liaquat Ali Baig.

Kestral is a respected Pakistani firm that performed substantial work there for my Pentagon portfolio. There was nothing secret about it. Given the widespread appreciation for Kestral's work, I am surprised that Scahill did not seek me out for comment.

Here are the facts: Kestral's efforts have helped Pakistan resist extremism and the narcotics trafficking that sustains it. But Scahill—citing anonymous "sources"—distorted Kestral's work and attacked Baig, endangering him, his family and his employees. Scahill certainly appreciates the weight of this attack and presumably is prepared for the consequences.

Today Pakistan and the United States are serious and willing partners against extremism along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border. It was not always thus, and Kestral has been a positive influence. During my Pentagon service, and working with Pakistani authorities, Kestral executed important construction and procurement projects under the counternarcotics rubric. Kestral's assistance and good work helped build relationships with the Pakistani Frontier Corps and Pakistani Army that pay dividends today for Pakistan, the United States and Afghanistan.

Scahill's article implies that Kestral's work with my portfolio was contrary to the will of Congress. I reject this. We kept the Democratically controlled Congress informed of activities involving Kestral in Pakistan. We were proud of these achievements and wanted Congress to see the tangible benefit of cooperation with Pakistan and to appreciate the capable Pakistani company accomplishing the work.

Construction work in Pakistan is unlike paving a road in Long Beach. It requires reliability, efficiency, competence and courage. Under the most difficult circumstances, Kestral and Liaquat Ali Baig demonstrated all of these qualities.

Scahill unjustifiably injures Kestral's reputation and mischaracterizes events. He relied on sources too timid to identify themselves but only too willing to smear Kestral and endanger its CEO, his family and his employees. This speaks volumes about Scahill's sources and indicates clearly that something other than "good government" motivated them.

The reckless and potentially deadly Scahill attack on Kestral and Baig reminds us of the harm that can be done by irresponsible and ideologically motivated reporting. It offers no credible insight into crucial events and no solutions. Without accountability, it heaps criticism on courageous people like Baig, Pakistani security forces and their partners in Pakistan performing dangerous work. Attacks from the sidelines by Scahill and his camp make cooperative international efforts to roll back extremism harder.

I hope Pakistan's government, party leaders and editors recognize this destructive phenomenon and resist, before it can damage a deepening and vital Pakistan-US partnership. Kestral has been front and center during the growth of that partnership, and its positive contributions should be commended, not condemned.

RICHARD J. DOUGLAS

Scahill Replies

BROOKLYN, N.Y.

I wonder if Richard Douglas actually read my article. His letter reads more like the script for an infomercial for Kestral—a private Pakistani military firm that collaborates with the US military in Pakistan—than a response to anything I reported about that firm.

I find it telling that Douglas fails to respond to the reporting I did on Kestral—namely, that it has worked with Blackwater and that Blackwater's men have accompa-

(continued on page 26)

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The Nation.
since 1865

Move Your Money

Are you angry about Wall Street's reckless excesses? Are you disappointed with President Obama's limp approach to reform? You can change this, acting individually and collectively. Withdraw your deposit and savings accounts from the large banks that brought the system to ruin and were subsequently rescued with billions in government bailouts. Put your money instead in smaller, safer banks or credit unions closer to home—the thousands of community institutions that do not harvest their profits from greed and recklessness.

EDITORIAL

"Move Your Money" is an electrifying slogan that's lighting up the Internet because it shows people how they can push back against the big dogs of banking. The concept is simple, but this is a big idea that could alter the timid direction of financial reform.

This campaign is potentially more than a feel-good gesture. If coordinated with institutional reform efforts, it could lead to a broad rebellion against the financial system, with citizens reclaiming the power to act directly when politicians are too intimidated by moneyed interests to act in the public interest. Economist Jane D'Arista put it crisply: "We are not a nation of widows and orphans. We have quite a lot of money, and people control some of it. They might ask why they don't control more of it."

The campaign was launched just before New Year's Eve by Arianna Huffington of the Huffington Post and Rob Johnson of the Roosevelt Institute. An influential bank-rating firm, Institutional Risk Analytics, donated a website window (moveyourmoney.info/find-a-bank), where citizens can find banks in their ZIP code that IRA certifies as safe and sound.

In the first forty-eight hours more than 100,000 responded with inquiries. Within a week, people had searched for good banks in 16,631 ZIP codes—nearly 40 percent of the nation. The search tool is now getting 45,000 users a day. Naturally, the corporate media promptly assured readers that "ordinary Americans lack the power to hurt the big banks," as a *Washington Post* headline put it.

Wrong. The cynics either do not understand banking or misunderstand the widespread public anger. Dennis Santiago, IRA's CEO and managing director, explained that banks compete fiercely for the "core deposits" provided by individual and small business accounts—this stable money is their preferred base for profitable lending. Take away core deposits, and bankers feel immediate balance-sheet stress. Expand the account base for community banks, and they gain greater stability and greater lending power. "Will moving your money have an effect?" Santiago asked. "And by effect, I don't mean making a momentary political statement. I mean making a structural difference to the country's financial system. The answer is yes."

Structural change ought to be the primary goal of financial reform—breaking up the concentrated power held by mega-banks and creating a balanced system of smaller, more diverse lending institutions that thrive by serving local credit needs. Alas, the Obama administration and Congress are pursuing the opposite goal—rescuing the behemoths that failed and encouraging even greater financial concentration. This will lead to more reckless adventures, more "too big to fail" bailouts.

"Move Your Money" is an important model for teaching people how to change a dysfunctional system. The same principle of taking control of your own money is at work in related reform movements. A campaign launched by faith-based

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This week at TheNation.com

News & Analysis

Ari Melber: The first year of Organizing for America

Robert Scheer: Don't blame China

Simon Apter: Realism and idealism in *The Real World*'s DC

Blogs Take Action: How to help Haiti

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Jane Mayer on protecting sources

Christopher Hayes on crazy deficit talk

Calendar Post your event

community organizations associated with the Industrial Areas Foundation identifies sky-high interest rates on credit cards and other lending as the ancient sin of usury. IAF groups are asking churches, foundations and local governments to withdraw funds from the usurious banks that profit by destroying borrowers. Organized labor, likewise, has launched an aggressive movement to insist on responsible investing values for the pension-fund wealth of working people, urging state treasurers and fund managers to invest for society's interests as well as good returns.

Changing the nature of finance capitalism is a long road, to be sure, and the industry will resist change every step of the way. But the fight begins in earnest when people decide to move their money.

Blueprint for Dems

COMMENT

Today, having already experienced decisive losses in governors' races in New Jersey and Virginia, Democrats see their prospects for 2010 as bleak. Polls show President Obama's approval numbers sagging, and some recent "generic ballots" show Republican candidates ahead of Democrats—a huge turnaround over the course of the past year. Perhaps most ominous, these new polls show that enthusiasm and interest in voting are far higher among Republicans than among Democrats. Given that off-presidential-year elections are often dominated by older and more conservative voters, low voter turnout among Democrats this fall could result in disaster for them. Why has this occurred? What can be done in the next few months to turn this scenario around?

In my view, the Democrats—including the president—have absurdly continued to stumble along the path of "bipartisanship" at exactly the same time the Republicans have waged the most vigorously partisan and obstructionist strategy in recent history.

Instead of making it clear that the first two years of the Obama administration would be about digging the country out of the incredible mess that Bush's eight years left us in (financial collapse, deep recession, record-breaking deficits, disintegrating healthcare system, two wars, lack of respect from the international community, neglect of the environment), President Obama, incredibly, has enabled tens of millions of Americans to now believe that Bush's failures are his as well.

Unlike Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, who consistently denounced Herbert Hoover's Republican policies as the cause of the country's perilous condition, Obama appears very reluctant to be partisan and point out to the American people the cause of our current crises. Can one imagine Obama, for example, telling the American people, as Roosevelt did in 1936, "I welcome" the "hatred" of the "economic royalists" whose greed has devastated the country?

In response to Obama's genteel and bipartisan outreach, the Republicans have undertaken an unprecedented campaign of rhetorical savagery. The Right-Wing Echo Chamber of Fox News and talk-radio has implied that Obama is an "illegitimate" president not born in the United States, that he is a friend of ter-

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Noted.

HELPING HAITI: As we go to press, there are no accurate counts of casualties from the earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12. President **René Préval** has called the toll "unimaginable" and reported that the Parliament building, schools and hospitals had collapsed. Even before the quake, Haiti had been plagued by natural and man-made disasters—hurricanes, deforestation, HIV/AIDS and IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies that opened the country up to rice-dumping from the United States, which in turn helped create massive food shortages.

We'll continue to publish more on the crisis in Haiti online and in our next issue, but for now we appeal to readers to donate as much as they can to the following organizations:

Partners In Health has been in Haiti since the mid-'80s and operates clinics in the Central Plateau and Artibonite regions. With hospitals and a highly trained medical staff in place, PIH is mobilizing resources to bring medical assistance and supplies to areas that have been hardest hit. Immediately after the quake, PIH's clinical director in Haiti, **Louise Ivers**, sent this desperate appeal for assistance via e-mail: "Port-au-Prince is devastated, lot of deaths. SOS. SOS… Temporary field hospital by us at UNDP needs supplies, pain meds, bandages. Please help us." You can donate online at pih.org.

The women's group **MADRE** has also worked in Haiti for many years, supporting community-based organizations, and has activated an emergency response through its partner organization, **Zanmi Lasante Clinic** (run by PIH). MADRE's partners are experts at reaching those in crisis and stretching resources to meet the myriad needs facing Haitian women and families (madre.org).

Teams from the group **Doctors Without Borders** were already working on medical projects in Haiti and immediately began treating quake victims. Gifts to the group's new **Haiti Earthquake Response** will help support that emergency medical care (doctorswithoutborders.org).

Despite heavy damage to its offices in Port-au-Prince, the UN relief organization **UNICEF** is coordinating donations of things like blankets, toothpaste, canned food and other staples. Call (800) 4UNICEF or go to unicef.org for information.

COALFIELD SETBACKS: The EPA ushered in the new year with a dark reminder of the coal industry's sway over the Obama administration. On January 4 the agency approved the **Hobet 45** mine expansion in West Virginia, the largest mountaintop-removal operation in Appalachia. The decision was announced only days before a group of environmental scientists released a long-awaited peer-reviewed study in the journal **Science** denouncing mountaintop-removal mining and calling for a moratorium on new permits.

The Hobet mine has already cleared a swath of land larger than Manhattan and left the nearby **Mud River** ecosystem on the "brink of a major toxic event" from strip-mining discharges, according to testimony in 2008 by a selenium expert. The **EPA** attempted to spin its decision as a compromise that would limit environmental damage, but few observers saw the move—which will bury more than three miles of healthy streams beneath toxic mine waste—as anything other than a payoff to the **United Mine Workers**, which is poised to gain hundreds of union jobs.

The administration handed Big Coal another victory on January 8, when the **National Park Service** announced the removal of West Virginia's **Blair Mountain** from the National Register. Blair Mountain was the site of the largest armed labor insurrection in US history: the 1921 struggle in which thousands of unionized coal miners and World War I vets fought to liberate non-union coal camps from ruthless absentee coal companies. Like the Hobet 45 mine, Blair Mountain is now slated for additional mountaintop-removal operations.

St. Louis–based coal giants **Arch** and **Patriot** saw their stocks skyrocket the day of the EPA announcement, prompting coalfield residents to wonder whose side the agency is on. According to West Virginia activist and radio broadcaster **Bob Kincaid**, who has led local delegations to Washington to plead their dire case to EPA officials, the administration has only two choices: "side with science and besieged American citizens in Appalachia by ending mountaintop removal now, or choose the toxic, cynical politics of Big Coal and seal Appalachia's doom."

JEFF BIGGERS

WINOGRAD VS. HARMAN: Much is being made about how Republican primary battles between mainstream conservatives and candidates favored by tea party activists could define the direction of the GOP. But ideological fights are playing out in Democratic primaries as well. One of the most intense of these races is in California's 36th Congressional District, where veteran progressive activist **Marcy Winograd** is mounting a savvy, well-organized "Jobs, Not Wars" challenge to incumbent **Jane Harman**, a favorite of neoconservatives who backed the Iraq invasion. Harman has championed expanding the war in Afghanistan (although she recently reversed course) and favors "leaving the military option on the table" for an attack on Iran. Add to that Harman's alliances with Republicans on intelligence, trade and economic issues, and it is no surprise that Winograd, who is backed by **Progressive Democrats of America** (PDA) and the Southern California chapter of **Americans for Democratic Action**, is running on the slogan "A *Real* Democrat for the People."

What is surprising is that prominent anti-war House members, including **Congressional Progressive Caucus** co-chair **Lynn Woolsey**, are not just backing the incumbent but agreeing to headline fundraising events for her. An open letter to Woolsey from longtime allies in PDA urges the Congresswoman to reconsider her choice: "Given your long-standing and exemplary leadership on a wide range of peace and justice issues, it would be counterproductive to aid Rep. Harman's re-election efforts," it explains. Recalling the victory of **Donna Edwards** over pro-war Democratic Congressman **Al Wynn** in a 2008 Maryland primary, the letter declares: "The reason that we have Rep. Donna Edwards in the House today as a stalwart advocate for peace and justice is precisely because of her successful primary campaign that unseated a non-progressive Democratic incumbent. Surely such victories are in the interests of all progressives."

JOHN NICHOLS

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rorists, that he is an antiwhite racist, that he rules unconstitutionally and that his administration reeks of Chicago-style corruption. And those are the respectful attacks!

In the overwhelmingly Democratic Senate the situation has been equally dismal. There, the Senate Finance Committee created a Gang of Six that included three Republicans—two of whom (Grassley and Enzi) are extremely conservative—to determine the shape of healthcare reform. Amid cries of "death panels," "socialized medicine" and "government takeover of healthcare," the meetings dragged on and on. On the floor of the Senate, the situation has been even worse. The Republicans have obstructed with a record number of filibusters and other delaying tactics. They even voted temporarily to deny funds to our troops in the field of combat as a way to delay healthcare reform. They are also nearly unanimous in opposing an increase in the debt limit, which if not raised would likely cause the collapse of both the American and international financial systems.

The result of all this is that Democrats of all stripes and many independents are perplexed, dispirited and sometimes disgusted. Constituency after constituency has been ignored or rejected.

Now, I may not be the greatest political strategist in the world, but I don't know how you win elections by ignoring those progressives who have worked hardest at the grassroots for your victories by not even considering a single-payer approach to healthcare and by turning your back on unions that provided significant financial support and door-to-door volunteers for Democratic campaigns by taxing their hard-won healthcare benefits. I don't know how you succeed politically when you restrict abortion rights for women, who, far more than men, consistently provide you with great margins of support. How do you preserve a big majority in Congress when you fail to be aggressive in protecting the interests of the huge off-year voting bloc of seniors who fall for hypocritical Republican attacks on Medicare? In other words, it should not surprise anyone that the Democrats are in serious trouble.

The time is short, but I believe the Democrats still have the potential to reverse their fortunes and bring out large numbers of their voters in the coming election. Important steps that should be undertaken in the coming months include the following: pass the strongest possible healthcare reform as soon as feasible—making clear that it will be significantly improved in the near future; pass a major bill to create millions of jobs rebuilding our infrastructure and moving our energy system in a sustainable direction; pass legislation allowing workers the right to join unions without unfair and illegal opposition from employers; break up financial institutions that are "too big to fail"; increase transparency at the Federal Reserve and replace Ben Bernanke with an economist who understands that one of the Fed's core missions is full employment; put limits on the bonuses paid by financial institutions; and enact Senate rules reform (no single senator should be able to bring the government to a halt).

We can learn from the past. The last time our nation faced economic challenges as great as ours, Franklin Roosevelt embraced progressive social policies and major financial and economic reform. His greatest legacy was to build a coalition of Americans who understood that if they stood together under a progressive banner, life could be better for the average person. Now is the time to remember that lesson. BERNIE SANDERS

Bernie Sanders, a member of the Senate Democratic Caucus, is the longest-serving Independent in US Congressional history. For a longer version of Senator Sanders's agenda, go to TheNation.com.

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

World's Tallest Building Opens in Dubai

This building finished in Dubai
Is many dozen stories high—
So high that it could terrify
A pilot flying in the sky,
So high that those who want to die
Can jump from upper floors and try
To prove that people cannot fly
But can enjoy a long goodbye,
So high that there is no supply
Of higher buildings, far or nigh.
Dubai, though I so hate to pry,
Why build a building quite that high?

The Battle for Iran

Are we witnessing the final days of the Islamic Republic of Iran? Judging from mainstream press coverage, it certainly seems so. Reacting to the street protests that rocked Iran after the death of the dissident Grand Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri in late December, veteran Iran observer Robin Wright asked whether "it is time to start wondering out loud whether Iran's uprising could become one of those Berlin Wall moments." While this is a tempting thought, given its implications for US-Iran relations, an obituary for the Islamic Republic is premature. What is required now is less of a projection of our own biases and preferences onto Iranian politics and instead a more sober analysis of the internal balance of power and the strengths and weaknesses of the regime and its domestic opposition.

COMMENT

There is little doubt that Iran's clerical oligarchy has been severely stunned and badly bruised by events following the disputed June election. The regime has suffered a huge blow to its legitimacy, and its management of the crisis has made matters worse. At the elite and societal level, unprecedented dissent and opposition have emerged as a confused regime increases state-sanctioned violence and begins a slow drift toward hard authoritarianism/semi-totalitarianism. However, despite this body blow,

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we are still a long way from witnessing the demise of the Islamic Republic.

Iran is a rentier state, which means it pays its bills by the sale of oil rather than through taxation. This gives the regime a significant degree of autonomy from society and immunizes it from societal pressure. This system also fuels an extensive patron-client network that allows the regime to buy the allegiance of millions of people whose livelihood is tied to its survival. The regime also retains ideological support in rural and poorer areas of the country, where more pious segments of the population are dependent on state-controlled media, with limited access to the Internet or satellite TV.

Furthermore, there exists a loyal group of hard-core devotees who have internalized the regime's core propaganda line, to wit: recent street protests are foreign-funded and orchestrated; Iran's domestic problems are caused by the machinations of the United States and Israel; and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is God's representative on earth. Exact figures on the size of this core group of ideological supporters are difficult to ascertain, but they are substantial in number, and many are willing to lay down their lives for the Supreme Leader if called upon.

Finally, the Islamic Republic retains solid control of key institutions that pertain to the use of violence, the administration of justice and economic production. There is little evidence that this control has weakened. However, there are deep divisions among conservatives, many of whom despise President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for his economic mismanagement and reckless foreign policy. Moderate conservatives are also upset at the severity of the human rights crackdown, and a recent parliamentary investigation has blamed the notorious public prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi for overseeing the abuse of detainees at Kahrizak prison. He might be sacrificed in a gesture to the opposition, but given his close ties to the Supreme Leader, this is far from certain.

The Green opposition draws its support from Iran's sizable middle and educated classes, with overwhelming support among intellectuals, students, women's groups and especially youth, who constitute two-thirds of the population. While the opposition emerged as a broad and loose coalition angered by a stolen election, it has steadily grown and expanded its class and geographical base and, most important, its political demands. Ahmadinejad's "coup d'état government" (as it is called by the opposition) is no longer the target of the protests; the Supreme Leader and clerical authoritarianism are. The relationship between the leadership and its supporters is tenuous and evolving. Protests are organized at the grassroots level without any coordination from above, and it remains to be seen if the Green Movement can maintain its discipline in the streets as the regime intensifies its crackdown. After the late December protests, there was considerable concern that people were engaging in random acts of violence, tarnishing a nonviolent movement and giving the regime an excuse to crack down. In an open letter in early January, the veteran opposition leader Ezzatollah Sahabi spoke to this point, warning the opposition about the dangers of a slide into "radicalism and violence."

The Green Movement's biggest asset is that it has already won an overwhelming ideological victory against the regime. In the realm of political ideas, the battle is over and Iran's clerical oligarchs know it—liberal democratic ideas have triumphed. Today the guardians of the Islamic Republic cannot tolerate an open debate or exchange of ideas about events of the past six months or more broadly about Iran's human rights and political record over the past thirty years. Nothing terrifies this regime more. An abstract public discussion about Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's theory of political rule, *velayat-e faqih* (the rule of the Islamic jurist), or even a consideration of the merits of democracy and secularism can land Iranians in prison. Censorship of newspapers, jamming of satellite television, blocking of Internet sites and, most revealing, the mass arrest of almost every leading Iranian pro-democracy and human rights activist, many of them journalists, speaks to the extreme paranoia of the Islamic Republic and its desire to prevent its citizens from getting access to information and dissenting points of view. Among Iranian expatriates, a public defense of clerical rule in Iran is unthinkable, not because the meeting would be disrupted (as sometimes happens) but because support for the clerical status quo in Iran is marginal when free debate is allowed.

The roots of this important ideological victory can be traced to the rise of the reform movement in the 1990s. It was during this period that Iranian political culture experienced a transformation, primarily because of the work of the country's religious intellectuals. The basic principles of liberal democracy and an indigenous understanding of "Islamic secularism" emerged and sank deep roots. This phenomenon underpins and informs the Green Movement today and has been recently chronicled in two excellent books, Mehran Kamrava's *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* and Farhang Rajaee's *Islamism and Modernism: The Changing Discourse in Iran*.

The struggle in Iran is akin to a boxing match between a slow-footed, unintelligent and arrogant heavyweight and a more agile, sophisticated and increasingly confident lightweight. The global audience overwhelmingly favors the underdog. Round One is over, and the weaker opponent has defied the odds not only by surviving; the lightweight has demonstrated prowess by striking several important blows that have disoriented and shaken the confidence of its more powerful adversary. Round Two has only just begun, and this championship bout is far from over.

NADER HASHEMI

Nader Hashemi teaches Middle East and Islamic politics at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver. He is the author of Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies *(Oxford).*

In his web exclusive "Breaking the News: Harry Reid Sees Black People," Kai Wright observes: "Stop the presses! Harry Reid said the word 'Negro' and, worse, suggested that white people are less afraid of light-skinned blacks who don't use double negatives.... Racial justice, meanwhile, is as anachronistic as the word 'Negro.' It's passé to point out—let alone make public policy based upon—the fact that yawning racial disparities exist in just about every aspect of American life." For the full text, go to TheNation.com.

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Ten Things.

Ten Things You Can Do to Improve Your Healthcare

As the House and Senate move toward final resolution of what could be the most important healthcare legislation in decades, there's little doubt we'll be stuck with a flawed, if probably somewhat improved, system. It might seem that there's little individuals can do at this point, but Donna Brook, a poet, associate editor of Hanging Loose Press (hanginloosepress.com) and avid *Nation* reader, suggests ten ways we can cut costs and improve outcomes no matter what happens in Washington. In addition to the obvious—not smoking, not abusing alcohol or drugs, avoiding fast food, getting regular exercise—you can use the information below to make a significant impact on your life and the lives of your loved ones. These ten items focus on prevention, the key to saving money and minimizing suffering.

1 Wash your hands! It may seem ridiculously simple, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is the best way to reduce infection and the spread of illness. The Mayo Clinic provides details at mayoclinic.com/health/hand-washing/HQ00407.

2 Carry with you at all times a list of your medications (including vitamins and supplements). It should include the drugs and dosages, how often you take them and the conditions they are treating. Also have on you your blood type, your emergency contact and your doctor's phone number, plus any drug allergies or special information (if, for example, you've had a hip replaced or have a pacemaker). You'll benefit in an emergency.

3 Do not choose a primary-care physician simply because his/her office is near your home. Find one who has privileges at the best hospital in your vicinity, can refer you to the best specialists and treats you with compassion. And make sure he/she follows hand-washing guidelines.

4 The Surgical Safety Checklist (who.int/patientsafety/safesurgery/ss_checklist/en/index.html) is reducing bad outcomes around the world. If you have to have an operation, ask the surgeon if the checklist will be used. And don't have elective surgery without getting a second opinion—preferably from a doctor who does not do surgery. *The New England Journal of Medicine* found that a vertebroplasty (where bone cement is injected into vertebrae) is no better than a placebo, and the same is true for arthroscopic "clean-out" of the knee, just to name two of many interventions that have no detectable benefit. If back surgery is suggested, first read Dr. John Sarno's books (spiritsite.com/writing/johsar). For more examples, see the online version of this column.

5 If you are pregnant or looking for an obstetrician, keep in mind that the US rate of C-sections is more than double what the World Health Organization considers acceptable. You should not have this major surgery—with all its risks—simply for the sake of convenience. Read more at thebirthsurvey.com.

6 Beware of the overuse of diagnostic imaging procedures such as MRIs and CAT scans. They add to costs and radiation exposure. If a doctor owns an MRI, he/she may want to use it to pay for it.

7 Most end-of-life care is too aggressive and expensive, without improving or changing patient outcomes. Patients with incurable illnesses often die in hospitals separated from loved ones and after suffering needlessly from invasive procedures. Hospice and palliative care can give people a more humane death while saving millions of dollars.

8 Choose dietary supplements carefully. Look for the USP seal on products. Check out usp.org/USP-Verified/dietarySupplements/supplements.html, and click on the logo of each supplement to see if it is USP verified.

9 Prepare yourself for catastrophic illness by reading *AfterShock* by Jessie Gruman (aftershockbook.com). Get a healthcare proxy or some form of advance directive in place. For more information go to putitinwriting.org/putitinwriting_app/index.jsp.

10 Education is key. When Japanese public schools began telling students to brush their teeth after every meal, the decline in tooth and gum disease was dramatic. More should be done in schools, but since we probably can't get adequate sex education in our public schools soon, parents or doctors must inform kids before sexual activity begins how to avoid STDs and use contraception. Right now, one out of four young American women has an STD. For more information go to mihivnews.com/teenweb.htm.

CONCEIVED BY WALTER MOSLEY with research by Rae Gomes

"Ten Things" is a monthly feature. Readers who wish to propose ideas for it should e-mail NationTenThings@gmail.com.

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Eric Alterman

What Would Molly Say?

Google "Molly Ivins," and you'll come up with a number of posts headlined "What Would Molly Say?" It's been a frequent refrain of Molly's myriad friends and admirers since we lost her to breast cancer at just 62 in January 2007. For many readers, her unique combination of good humor, common sense, lightly worn erudition and political fearlessness made it possible to slog through the rest of the MSM with one's sanity (barely) intact. The demand for such journalism has only grown stronger as its supply rapidly diminishes.

I found myself wondering WWMS on the day Chris Dodd withdrew from the 2010 Senate race in Connecticut. The withdrawal, unlike Byron Dorgan's in North Dakota a day earlier, vastly improved Democrats' chances of retaining that seat, and brought to, um, four the number of incumbent Democrats who are planning not to run. (That's compared with six Republicans.) In the House, ten Democrats are planning to retire (compared with fourteen Republicans). Among the nation's governors, it is three Democrats (and four Republicans). Add it all up, and what do you get? According to that unerring guardian of Beltway bloviation—ABC News's The Note—"Democrats Are Dropping Like Flies." A contradiction, you say? Turns out that it, too, is the Democrats' fault: "You know things are bad for Democrats when a move that actually improved their chances in this fall's elections…was universally interpreted as yet another sign of the party's bleak prospects," explains *Wall Street Journal* ace columnist Gerald Seib. (Remember, he said "universally.")

Earlier the same week, I had a WWMS moment in reaction to the coverage of the "Underpants Bomber." Recall that when the so-called Shoe Bomber got past security in late December 2001, the Bush White House simply clammed up, and the media (and the Democrats) were happy to go along. The president did not mention it at all until a press conference six days after it took place. Meanwhile, after the shenanigans of Mr. Underpants, Barack Obama issued three public statements and announced two security reviews and a directive on how to try to correct the problem. So what did we hear? "In the Obama administration, protecting the rights of terrorists has been more important than protecting the lives of Americans," explained Newt Gingrich, who made more appearances on *Meet the Press* than any other individual last year. "I don't know that Obama has the same ability to reflect the emotions of the country as Bush did at certain points in his presidency," worried its host, David Gregory. And with almost breathtaking lunacy, Rudy Giuliani went on ABC's *Good Morning America* to insist, "We had no domestic attacks under Bush; we've had one under Obama." The show's host, George Stephanopoulos, did not think this rather unusual claim worth a follow-up. Lord knows what Molly would have made of all this…

Many of Molly's fans may not be aware that she spent a short, unhappy spell at the *New York Times* in the late 1970s and early '80s. She departed after then–executive editor A.M. Rosenthal objected to her use of the term "gang pluck" to describe a festival in Corrales, New Mexico, where people in the town of 3,000 got together to drink and cut the heads off chickens. I was nevertheless shocked by the churlishness shown toward Ivins in the venomous review of Bill Minutaglio and W. Michael Smith's new biography, *Molly Ivins: A Rebel Life* (PublicAffairs), recently published in the paper's book review. For reasons I cannot fathom, the life story of this polymathic, proud liberal pundit was turned over to a conservative ex–tabloid gossip currently at work on an oral history of William F. Buckley. The reviewer, Lloyd Grove, pronounced Ivins's entire life "a pose" because she had been born to well-to-do parents, educated at good schools and spoke French. Never mind that Molly never pretended otherwise. (Her *Times* obit quotes her explaining, "I spent my girlhood as a Clydesdale among thoroughbreds.")

According to Grove's logic, one is by definition a poseur if one does not adopt the exact mores and lifestyle choices of one's parents. Grove also complains that Molly's life does not provide for "the biography of a significant figure in journalism" because "Ivins never wrote the big, important book about Texas that she'd always wanted to." Well, far be it from me to be rude enough to point out that this argument is being made by someone who has never written a book of any size whatsoever. More significant, it reflects not only a misunderstanding of the biography in question—which is entirely about Molly's personal and professional progress and pretty much ignores the substance of her work in journalism—but also the historic role of the political pundit. Walter Lippmann was, uniquely, a political philosopher with a day job in journalism. Leaving his example aside, ask yourself: Did James Reston ever write a "big" book? Did Joseph Alsop? Did Robert Novak or Robert Bartley or even William Safire? None even tried. But were one to compare the collected columns of each of these infamous bigfeet with those of Molly Ivins, you'd find a journalist whose significance lay not only in her being correct about the underlying currents of American politics with far more frequency than any of those famous figures, but with better humor, sharper prose, greater erudition, deeper humanity and, perhaps most significant, genuine bravery. She was nearly alone in predicting the disastrous fallout of the 1999 decision to repeal Glass-Steagall and deregulate the banking industry. And in November 2002 she warned us, "The greatest risk for us in invading Iraq is probably not war itself, so much as: What happens after we win?…There is a batty degree of triumphalism loose in this country right now."

As we observe the third anniversary of her death, we are ever more the lesser for her loss. ■

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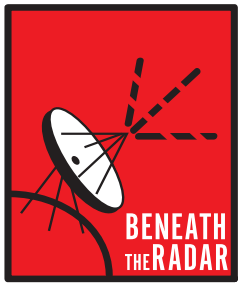
Gary Younge

Believers in Great Men Think Alike

After rereading *The God That Failed*, a book in which six prominent ex-Marxists relate their disillusionment with communism, the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said expressed his irritation at what seemed like a show trial for a straw man. "Why as an intellectual did you believe in a god anyway? And besides, who gave you the right to imagine that your early belief and later disenchantment were so important?"

Obama's first anniversary in power is approaching to howls of betrayal from parts of the left. Let's begin by acknowledging that there are many grounds for disappointment. The failure to show leadership in the healthcare debate; the decision to leave much of Bush's torture apparatus intact; the lack of alacrity on ending the Iraq occupation; failing to get rid of "don't ask, don't tell"; bailing on his pledges to renegotiate NAFTA and impose a foreclosure moratorium.



Some of these things can be explained, but none should be excused. It is true that Obama inherited a mess. But that is no reason to give him the benefit of the doubt on his campaign promises. He's the president. He has all the benefits he needs. With one in eight people on food stamps, one in six black people unemployed and thousands still being slaughtered in Afghanistan and Iraq, "change" is not a slogan for many who backed him; it's an urgent necessity.

The past year has been a painful lesson in the distinction between elections, politics and power. Elections change personnel; politics changes agendas; power is the means by which those agendas are put into action. Getting Obama into the White House was the beginning of the process, not the end. In the context of his campaign, the balance of forces in American politics and the demands of those who elected him, these frustrations make sense. Outside it, the leap from disenchantment to accusations of betrayal owes more to emotional and cognitive dissonance than political critique or strategic intervention.

Broadly speaking, this outrage flows from two camps—those who placed too much faith in what he might do and those who placed none.

From the first, there is the anguish of the infatuated suitor scorned. I loved you, I followed you, I believed in you and this is how you repay me. This is little more than projection. Obama never claimed he was a radical. True, he did offer hope and inspiration. But I don't recall him saying that within a year the entrenched interests of American capital, the lobbyists, corporations, Fox commentators and militarists would throw their hands up in surrender at the flash of his smile and the lilt of his rhetoric. His decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan, for example, is definitely wrongheaded. But to qualify as betrayal he would have had to have promised something else, when the truth is this is one pledge he kept and many of us wish he hadn't.

From the second group, there is the self-satisfied smirk of the pundit for whom the itch to say "I told you so" has become too irresistible not to scratch. Absent any other coherent political or electoral strategy that might get us from where we were to where we need to be, they got their disillusion in early to avoid the rush. Refusing to see any potential in the mobilization of huge numbers of young, black, Latino and union workers who took part in his campaign, they understood the energy and excitement as little more than a moment of mass delusion. Like a broken clock, they just had to wait until the moment when they could pronounce themselves correct. In the words of Friedrich Engels, "What childish innocence it is to present one's own impatience as a theoretically convincing argument!"

While these two camps are driven by different impulses, they have two important things in common. First, they share a right-wing assumption, made famous by Thomas Carlyle, that history is made by "great men" rather than the far more complex interaction of people, time, place and power. Their ire is trained on one man and one alone. Not a system, institution or kaleidoscope of forces but Obama. If he were better, things would be different. If he tried harder, he could succeed. Such charges betray a devotion to a man and reverence for an office that is indecent in a democracy and incompatible with left politics.

Second, it suggests that this "great man" exists as an abstraction, in the absence of other forces, constraints and material realities. What movements might support or oppose him and what events might distract him are, to these detractors, apparently irrelevant. They reduce politics from an engagement with the world as it is to an act of will to construct a new world out of whole cloth. In this world the need to get sixty votes in the Senate, and the compromises that might emerge from that reality, have no meaning.

The disappointments of Obama's first year were never difficult to predict. They were evident not only in his politics but in the alignment of forces and institutions in which he is embedded. Obama may have emerged as the most viable progressive candidate in these elections and the most progressive Democrat in the White House since Lyndon Johnson. But that is not the same as his actually being progressive.

Disappointment is one thing you can usually be certain of if you are on the liberal left in America. Optimism is the real challenge. Some of us drew hope from the energy, activism and diverse nature of Obama's base, which we believed might emerge as a movement. That hasn't happened. But it was rooted in an understanding not that he would lead us leftward but that there might now be enough of us to push him leftward and that he might be responsive to that pressure. "If there is no struggle there is no progress," said abolitionist Frederick Douglass. "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." ■

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CHANGE WON'T COME EASY

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL & ROBERT L. BOROSAGE

Many progressives thought we had taken back America in 2008, but the work has just begun.

President Obama hailed the healthcare reform bill coming out of the Senate as the "most important piece of social legislation since the Social Security Act passed in the 1930s." Former Democratic Party chair Howard Dean denounced it as a "giveaway to insurance companies."

Larry Summers, Obama's lead economic adviser, described the $780 billion recovery plan as the largest stimulus plan in the country's history. Economists like Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz warned from the beginning that it was too small to lift us out of the Great Recession.

The president described the administration's financial reform package as a "sweeping overhaul," a "transformation on a scale not seen since…the Great Depression." Former Federal Reserve chair Paul Volcker warned that the proposed "safety net" for big banks would encourage much greater "risk taking."

Congressman Ed Markey, chair of the House Select Committee on Energy Independence, hailed the energy bill that was passed by the House as "the most important energy and environmental bill in our nation's history." Environmental leaders were underwhelmed; some considered it worse than the current law.

The discordant reality of these times is that these conflicting statements are all essentially true. "I want you to be ready," Bill Clinton warned bloggers about healthcare reform at the Netroots Conference in August, to "accept less than a full loaf." He could easily have been talking about the Obama presidency itself. Progressives must determine how to respond now that the fierce resistance to change has revealed itself.

The euphoria of a year ago is dissipating. Then, in the wake of a calamitous and discredited conservative government, Americans voted for change, electing a stunningly gifted leader and large Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. A mobilized activist base appeared ready to throw itself into the fray, and an emerging majority coalition suggested the potential for a long-term realignment.

Now the struggles of the first year of the Obama administration are generating increasing demoralization and anger. Disappointment about reforms in motion—healthcare, jobs, climate change—marks those who care the most. The recovery plan, which has revived Wall Street but not working families, is fueling dangerous right-wing populism. Substituting an unwinnable "good war" in Afghanistan for the unwinnable "bad war" in Iraq, along with a military budget exceeding that of George W. Bush, is a recipe for failure. The administration's foreign policy—despite the promise in Cairo of engaging the Muslim world and in Prague of embracing disarmament—is increasingly described by neocons as providing more continuity than change from the Bush years. Democrats cringe at prospects for the fall elections. Despite all the obvious eloquence and intelligence of the new president, many wonder what happened to the transformational presidency.

It Ain't Easy; Everything's Broken

Turns out, Obama is not the Messiah, and those who thought so were always fooling themselves. The disappoint-

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THAT'S WHY SO MANY SOMEBODIES READ IT.

Reverend Jesse Jackson is a longstanding **Nation** *reader.*

(Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a Nation editor once wrote, "it is one of the superb facts about *The Nation* that you can no more 'own' it than you can own the spirit it represents.")

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ments of Obama's first year are less the product of his failures than of the balance of forces he faces in Washington and in the country. Many progressives thought we had taken back America with the election of 2008, but in reality the work had only just begun.

In fact, the president has been bolder than many expected, summoning the country to address fundamental challenges it can no longer afford to ignore. Yet the ambition of Obama's vision has been accompanied by a marked caution in conception and execution. Obama clearly aspires to a historic presidency, one that defines a new era as FDR's or Reagan's did. But he has never been a movement progressive the way Reagan was a movement conservative. He has surrounded himself with the brightest and best of the Democratic establishment, drawn inevitably from those marinated in the Clinton years. Many of his leading advisers—from Larry Summers and Timothy Geithner to Robert Gates—were directly implicated in the decisions that helped to drive us off the cliff. These voices are not advocates of transformation.

So the reform proposals that emerge from the administration often fall short not only of the hopes of progressives but of the objectives the president himself defines and the change the country needs. Obama outlined a new foundation for the economy in his "Sermon on the Mount," but the big banks were rescued, not reorganized, and no industrial policy accompanied the commitment to a new economy. Bankers were chastised for their bonuses, but there was no drive to hold executives accountable and empower workers, both central to an economy that sustains a broad middle class. The president shelved Bush's failed cowboy bellicosity, but the decision to escalate in Afghanistan accedes to the Bush folly of waging war against terrorism rather than intensifying global law enforcement.

Most surprising has been the reluctance to engage the right boldly in the war of ideas. Reagan consolidated the conservative era in part by bludgeoning reigning liberalism with a relentless conservative critique. He tacked and retreated on policy when necessary, but his ideological assault never faltered. Obama has a rare ability to frame the contrast with the right, to counter its market fundamentalism and virulent nihilism with a compelling statement of our shared values, with government as the necessary instrument of our common purpose.

But for much of the year, Democrats have been having policy debates—on the public option, on cap and trade, on systemic risk regulation—while Republicans and the resurgent right have been waging an argument about values and ideas, on liberty and free markets, freedom and small government. Although the administration has reminded Americans of the catastrophic legacy left by the Bush years, it has seldom indicted the conservative ideas that were the source of the calamity. Instead the president prefers to blame the process—"partisanship…politics…ever quickening news cycles…endless campaigns focused on scoring points instead of meeting our common challenges."

That default complements an insider Congressional strategy that prefers backroom compromise to public mobilization. This president enunciates the elements of his reform proposals and then lets Congress and his aides to do their work offstage. But that cedes the terrain to the legions of the old order that are mobilized to fend off real reform.

The past months have exposed the elements of that resistance—the cynical Republican strategy of lockstep obstruction, the Senate rules that empower a handful of small-state conservatives and the embittered Joe Lieberman. (It is worth remembering that there were majorities in both houses of Congress for a bolder stimulus and far better healthcare reform.)

And of course, at the heart of the opposition are the entrenched corporate complexes that feed off public subsidies and a corrupt Congress. These have been boom times for Democratic lobbyists and former officeholders. The commercial banks deployed nearly 417 registered lobbyists in 2009. The insurance and drug lobbies spent about $1.4 million a day, with 350 former legislators and staffers lined up to weaken healthcare reform. Legislators in both parties succumbed to the pervasive corruptions of our money politics.

Democrats have been having policy debates, while Republicans and the resurgent right are waging an argument about values and ideas.

The result is that even when historic reforms like healthcare emerge, they are so battered that supporters end up dispirited. Democrats face going into the 2010 midterm elections with double-digit unemployment, rescued bankers awarding themselves million-dollar bonuses, rising casualties in Afghanistan, the right mobilized and progressive activists dismayed. If Republicans score major victories in the election, that will make everything harder; the administration will become more cautious, not less. Clearly, if we are not to squander the best opportunity for progressive reform in thirty years, something will have to change.

Going Grassroots

The president warned that change wouldn't come easy. From the start, the administration devoted energy and resources to organizing a unified base of activists. Organizing for Obama promised use of an unmatched list of activists and supporters built during the campaign. Donors were tapped to set up new entities—Common Purpose Project, Unity '09, etc.—to coordinate messages and field operations. Significant resources went to coalitions to help drive healthcare, climate change and immigration reform. The administration's argument was and is compelling. This is a reform moment with the most liberal president in memory. It is time to unite, provide support for his leadership and help drive reform.

Progressives and grassroots networks across the country rallied to that call. Remarkable work has been done. Broad coalitions were built, arming activists with more capacity and

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better coordination in the process of lobbying legislators. New constituencies—the faith community, young people and small business owners—have been enlisted. Resources were devoted to conservative districts and states where key swing votes had to be won.

These efforts have propelled the president's key reforms. When tea-baggers threatened to torpedo healthcare reform, progressives—led by Health Care for America Now, unions and MoveOn—mobilized and soon overwhelmed them in town hall meetings.

But there were costs associated with channeling progressive energy through the administration. Obama aides, led by Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, argued fiercely against going after the Democrats—Blue Dogs and New Dems—who were impeding reform, and the White House chose not to mobilize its base to pressure them. Groups were often blindsided by backroom deals like the one with the drug companies that sustained the ban on negotiating lower drug prices.

One unintended consequence was that populist anger has been channeled by the right, not the left. Tea-baggers, well funded by established interests, turned rage against those trying to dig out of the hole rather than those who got us into it. Their voice was inchoate, but at the core was a fury at Big Government, Big Banks and Big Business, which were taking their jobs, pocketing public subsidies and helping "those people" while raising their taxes. On the left, there has been no movement comparable to the labor and socialist demonstrations in the '30s or the civil rights movement in the '60s that forced the pace of change.

If Democrats don't deliver on jobs, the economy won't recover, and the 2010 elections may well snuff out any chance for reforms.

Moving Forward: Ideas Matter

Cynicism is the cheap coin of politics. The left blogosphere is rife with the complaints of the disillusioned (denouncing politicians as crooks, the government as corrupt and Obama as compromised) and threats to give up and stay home. That would be a profound mistake. This country is enmeshed in a fierce debate about its future. Can we summon up the will and the majorities needed to meet the critical challenges we face? Or will we continue our decline, ceding ground to the entrenched corporate cronyism that profits from conservative misrule?

Winning this debate requires new thinking as well as independent organizing. Progressives should be moving outside the Beltway, working to organize protest movements for social justice and giving voice to the displaced and the unemployed. We should be helping to chart a new course while exposing the false idols and powerful interests that stand in the way.

And we should be directly joining the argument with the resurgent right. One basic lesson must be repeated and elaborated upon: the mess that we are in results not from inaction or partisan stalemate but from the failure of conservative policies and ideas in action. Only by coming together to demand an accountable democratic government on our side, free from the special interests that feed off it, can we build a stronger, more just and more vibrant America.

Reform Matters

A renewed focus on building protest movements can bolster, not weaken, reform efforts. National debates over fundamental reforms will provide the grist for such organizing. In 2010, assuming healthcare finally passes, the legislative agenda will turn to jobs and financial accountability, two issues that are vital to building the new economy. Politically, the fall elections will likely depend on which candidates and which party can convince skeptical voters that they are on the side of working people and for curbing Wall Street's excesses.

Here progressive organizing and protests that challenge the limits of the current debate are essential. On jobs, the fundamental questions are whether a commitment will be made of sufficient scale to meet the deepening jobs crisis and whether that initiative will be sufficiently targeted to impact those areas most devastated. Republicans and Blue Dog Democrats are already declaiming against any new program. The administration, badgered about deficits and believing the economy is on the road to recovery, is likely to support a face-lift when reconstructive surgery is needed.

The stakes here couldn't be higher. If Democrats don't deliver on jobs, the economy won't recover, and the 2010 election may well snuff out any chance for reforms. At the very least, they have to show Americans that they're fighting for jobs. Independent organizing that gives voice to the unemployed, already begun by labor unions and civil rights groups, is essential. The House Progressive Caucus can play a major role in raising the bar and forcing the issue.

Similarly, the debate on financial reform should provide the context for progressive protest organizing. The White House plans to pick a fight with the banking lobby over the proposed Consumer Financial Protection Agency, which would create an independent cop to police banks and protect consumers from financial frauds and abuses. In the House, Republicans voted with the banks against reform. In contrast, progressives are pushing sweeping reforms that go to the heart of the financial excesses of the past years—auditing the Federal Reserve; breaking up the big banks; taxing windfall profits, excess bonuses and speculation; outlawing exotic instruments; and limiting usurious interest rates.

Independent organizing can tap into a wellspring of public fury. Muckraking is needed to detail and broadcast the systemic frauds and corruptions. Creative demonstrations can embarrass the bank lobby and the legislators on the take. It is only if the big banks' money becomes toxic that there is any hope of gaining the reforms needed to curb their power. Here is where the creativity and energy of the Obama activists, many frustrated by the timidity of Organizing for America, can find expression.

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Pundits predict that the other issues on the president's agenda—climate change, immigration reform, employee free choice—will have a difficult time getting a hearing before the 2010 elections. Progressives will have to push hard to ensure that these reforms—vital to both the new economy and to consolidating the emerging progressive majority—are not shunted to the side.

Because of the botched terrorist attempt to bomb a plane on Christmas Day, the administration enters the year on the defensive on terrorism. The furor will add to bipartisan support for an enlarged military budget and for military escalation in Afghanistan, Yemen and elsewhere. The president will sound more bellicose notes on terrorism. The opposition to escalation in Afghanistan, which probably still enjoys majority support among Democrats in the House, will have to redouble its work, educating Americans about the costs and the stakes and offering common-sense alternative strategies to meet the threat of terrorism.

Challenge Those Who Stand in the Way

Democratic prospects look grim for the fall elections. In low-turnout midterm elections, the passion of base supporters plays a large role. Clearly, the right will be mobilized. Progressives will have to confound the widespread expectation that they will not match the right's fervor.

The elections will turn into a national referendum on the country's direction. Will Americans punish those pushing for reform, or those standing in the way? The clear focus must be to make certain that Republicans pay for their irresponsible strategy of obstruction. Here the GOP's opposition to creating jobs and curbing banks should provide a clear picture of what side they are on.

But this cannot be a purely partisan effort. Democrats who have consistently opposed or weakened vital reforms should not get a free pass. Progressives should be organizing primary challenges against the most egregious Blue Dogs—exemplified by Representative Melissa Bean, who gilded her campaign war chest by leading the banks' lobby efforts to weaken financial reform. It would be best to do this in districts or states where Democrats are strong, so the seats are not lost; but that may not be possible. Organizing formidable challenges in a couple of districts will send an important message.

The Audacity of Hope

As Frederick Douglass taught, "power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and never will." Digging out of the hole that conservatives left Americans in can't be done overnight. The president has called on the country to face daunting challenges. Every step of reform is contested by powerful interests. Ruinous policies—such as our commitment to policing the world—have broad bipartisan support. Yet we haven't had this kind of moment since the 1960s. With persistence, work, rededication and struggle, we can issue the demands that change requires. This is a time for neither the innocent nor the cynical. It is a time for passion, for tenacity and, yes, for hope. ■

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OBAMA AT ONE

President Barack Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009, ignited the hopes of millions of Americans seeking real change. One year later, many progressives are worried that the Obama administration's commitment to change is not as strong as it should be. Some of his stalwart supporters feel anguish at what they see as a betrayal or delay of his campaign's promises, while many of his longtime critics feel vindicated in their initial skepticism. Other progressives, however, take stock of the advances that have been made in Washington and urge the left against making definitive pronouncements on his presidency so soon. Here at *The Nation*, Obama's politics and policies have been at the center of vigorous, persistent discussion and debate among our writers, editors and contributors. How one views Obama's first year is no doubt guided by one's political beliefs, but also by sensibility and intuition. On this occasion, we canvassed an array of opinions from our community—and beyond. We asked the simple question: Looking back at President Obama's first year in office, what do you think the high point has been? And what has been your sharpest moment of disappointment? The answers appear below.

MICHAEL TOMASKY

Editor, *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*

In straightforward policy terms, healthcare reform is the best thing Obama has done. Yes, expectations were raised for more, and the process was painful to watch, but the changes in this bill are greater than anything the Clintons tried to do, anything Al Gore ran on, anything John Kerry ran on, anything Howard Dean ran on, etc. It's a big, big, big deal. Assuming it passes.

The civil liberties area has been his worst. This is the one area in which the president's actions don't remotely match the candidate's promises. On everything else, whether you like the policies or not, he's doing pretty much what he said he would do (yes, even in Afghanistan).

In terms of style of governance, Obama has if anything over-learned some lessons of history: it was good that he didn't want to dictate a health bill to Congress, but he ceded too much authority; it was good that he didn't want to mollycoddle Israel, but he alienated even some friendly Kadima and Labour elements, etc. Those who pay too much attention to history are doomed to… well, maybe we'll see.

A difficult but good first year. His fate will be 80 percent dependent on the state of the economy. That's where the effort needs to go.

GLENN GREENWALD

Writer, *Salon*

The overarching attribute of Obama's first year in office was his eagerness to accommodate the various permanent power factions that have long ruled Washington, and one can view both his high and low points through this prism.

His high point came in mid-April, when he announced he would declassify and release four memos from the Bush Office of Legal Counsel that authorized and graphically described torture techniques used by the CIA. He did so in the face of furious opposition from the intelligence community and with the knowledge that he would be accused of endangering our security. Release of those memos revitalized debate over Bush's torture regime and was an all-too-rare instance of courage and commitment to transparency from the new president. American presidents simply do not disseminate to the world memos detailing our national crimes committed in secret, but Obama did exactly that.

Obama's low point was when he got caught in August having secretly negotiated various deals with PhARMA over healthcare reform. Substantively, the deals banned what he long vowed he would institute—bulk price negotiations and drug reimportation. Worse, they were a blatant violation of his pledge to conduct all healthcare negotiations in public (even on C-SPAN), in order to prevent exactly this type of sleazy deal-making with industry interests. Massive giveaways to the most powerful corporations, effectuated in the dark, were what Obama most railed against as a candidate, and what he has repeatedly done as president.

CHRIS BOWERS

Blogger, OpenLeft.com

The main hope for any administration is that it will take the American people's side in the fight against the anti-democratic corporatists who are picking our pockets. During 2009, Obama chose different sides in that fight at different times, forming the lowlights and highlights of his first year.

The most negative example came in mid-December, when Senate Democrats agreed to a Medicare buy-in for Americans aged 55-64 as the compromise of a compromise in the grand fight over a public health insurance option. Joe Lieberman, who had proposed the idea himself only three months earlier, flipped and swore a filibuster. Later that same day, the White House pressured the Senate to take sides with Lieberman and the health insurance indus-

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try, getting the Medicare buy-in stripped from the bill.

However, in October, Obama's FCC appointees began to draw up regulations to ensure net neutrality after Congress refused to restrain telecoms from controlling speech on the Internet. In addition, in December, Obama's EPA began to draw up regulations to reduce emissions of the six most dangerous greenhouse gases, in the face of Senate inaction. These new regulations will bypass Congress and its corporate lobbyists.

Perhaps these are just glimmers of hope, but at least twice the Obama administration used its authority to circumvent a pro-plutocracy Congress. Those moments were the political highlights of 2009.

ADOLPH REED JR.

Professor of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

In January 1996 I wrote the following about Barack Obama in my *Village Voice* column: "In Chicago, we've gotten a foretaste of the new breed of foundation-hatched black communitarian voices; one of them, a smooth Harvard lawyer with impeccable do-good credentials and vacuous-to-repressive neoliberal politics, has won a state senate seat on a base mainly in the liberal foundation and development worlds. His fundamentally bootstrap line was softened by a patina of the rhetoric of authentic community, talk about meeting in kitchens, small-scale solutions to social problems, and the predictable elevation of process over program—the point where identity politics converges with old-fashioned middle-class reform in favoring form over substance. I suspect that his ilk is the wave of the future in U.S. black politics."

In 2007 Matt Taibbi described him as "an ingeniously crafted human cipher, a man without race, ideology, geographic allegiances, or, indeed, sharp edges of any kind. You can't run against him on the issues because you can't even find him on the ideological spectrum."

In 2006 Ken Silverstein noted Obama's deep financial industry connections. Glen Ford, Paul Street and many others have stressed those and other disturbing connections, including his penchant for supporting more conservative Democratic candidates against more liberal ones.

Obama indicated no later than the summer of 2007 that he intended, if elected, to extend the war in Afghanistan into Pakistan.

The only surprise about his presidency is how many ersatz leftists cling to the fiction that he's anything other than a superficially articulate neoliberal Democrat in the Clinton mold and that his administration would act in any other way.

HENDRIK HERTZBERG

Senior Editor and Staff Writer, *The New Yorker*

No-Drama Obama—remember him? Remember that admirable temperament, that ability to peer over the horizon, that poker player's cool? That chess player's sense of where the game will be several moves ahead? That matter-of-fact, unsentimental empathy? That serene immunity to the 24/7 cable/talk-radio/Internet hysteria machine? These qualities of mind and character, which I admired in candidate Obama, I still admire in President Obama. Perhaps that's why I don't see his first year in terms of high points and sharp disappointments. There have been some of each, of course, but he's still up on the bridge, holding a steady course in a violent storm, even as many of the rest of us are clutching the railings and puking over the side.

I seldom miss a chance to bitch and moan about the flaws of our wheezing, rusted-out, barely functioning electoral and governmental machinery. So I haven't been terribly surprised at how difficult it has proved for Obama to get his modest, moderately liberal program through Congress, especially the Senate. These difficulties are not his fault. Blaming him—accusing him of cowardice, of not having "balls," of being a corporate shill, etc.—is infantile. To the extent that the left component of the center-left is indulging in that sort of self-destructive, misdirected petulance—well, I guess *that's* my "sharpest disappointment" of this president's first year.

MARCIA ANGELL, MD

Senior Lecturer, Harvard Medical School

President Obama's greatest success has been to show the rest of the world a new face of understanding and cooperation. Still, count me among those who are disappointed in his first year. He seems to lack the courage to push for the fundamental reforms necessary to deal with the enormous problems we face, and instead appeases the very forces that have gotten us into the mess. By appointing Geithner and Summers, for example, he ensured that Wall Street, but not Main Street, would be rescued. More dismaying, he extended Bush's policy of detaining certain terrorism suspects indefinitely, and he is well on his way to expanding the self-destructive war in Afghanistan.

As for healthcare, my area of expertise, the reform bill Obama is cobbling together wrongly retains the central role of the private insurance companies and requires millions of people to buy their products at whatever price they charge. True, some

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of the industry's discriminatory practices would be outlawed, but if that adds to their costs, they can simply raise premiums. The pharmaceutical industry can also continue to charge whatever it likes. If the bill is fully implemented (which I doubt), it may restrain the growth of government health spending, which is all the CBO cares about, but it will surely increase inflation in the rest of the system. Obama knows that a single-payer system is the only way to provide universal care while controlling costs, but he was unwilling to throw his weight behind it. All he seems to want now is the political victory of getting a health bill passed—any bill, no matter how untenable.

My sharpest moment of disappointment came when the administration supported the prohibition against buying lower-priced drugs from Canada and Europe. During his campaign, Obama promised to end this absurd restriction, but now he's siding with the pharmaceutical industry.

It's not enough to understand what needs to be done; the president has to be willing to fight for it and, yes, take political risks.

WARD SUTTON

KATHERINE
NEWMAN
Professor of Sociology and Public Affairs, Princeton University

For progressives who supported John Edwards—before his personal implosion—the first year of Obama's presidency has been, more or less, what we expected. The symbolic victory of our first African-American presidency gave way to disappointment over his centrism, which comes as no great surprise, since Obama never advertised himself as a man of the left. And indeed, he isn't.

Accordingly, we should not be surprised that Obama did not bring to heel the Bush administration's Great Giveaway to the nation's banking sector. This is a travesty of the highest order, a betrayal of millions of taxpayers whose savings have been swallowed by those well-heeled Wall Street tycoons busily doing "the Lord's work." Thousands have seen their savings go up in smoke, their homes fall into foreclosure and their jobs evaporate, only to witness the spectacle of stratospheric year-end bankers' bonuses. Efforts to bring the wildcat financial industry back under strict regulatory control appear to have taken a back seat to the "needs" of the industry to retain the best and the brightest. Why not let them go job hunting on their spectacular record of institutional collapse?

On the plus side of the equation, and with a nod once again to the erstwhile Mr. Edwards, we have to count the deeply flawed but nonetheless historic healthcare bill. It is no panacea and may even drag the Democrats down if its benefits do not kick in before 2014. But the extension of health insurance to millions who were previously left on their own is a social policy victory.

ANDREW
BACEVICH
Professor of International Relations, Boston University

As a conservative who voted for Obama, I hoped his election would signal a clear repudiation of his predecessor's reckless and ill-advised approach to national security policy. A clear break from the past just might create the space for a principled debate about the proper direction of US policy after the cold war, after 9/11 and after the passing of the neoconservative moment. Out of that debate might come a more prudent and realistic appreciation of the capabilities and limitations of military power. Washington might wean itself from its infatuation with war—at least so I fancied. This has turned out to be a great illusion. Obama's decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan indicates that he will not break with the existing national security consensus. The candidate who promised to "change the way Washington works" has become Washington's captive. Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009, was truly a great day, for all sorts of reasons. But it's been all downhill since then.

ZBIGNIEW
BRZEZINSKI
Former National Security Adviser

I think Obama's greatest moment was his speech rejecting the "war on terror" as an excessive and dangerous way of responding to the kind of terrorism that has been directed at the United States, because it was increasingly pitting the United States against the entire Islamic world. I think that was a wise course of action, I think it was a wise speech, I thought it was a wise redefinition of America's foreign policy. And the disappointment doesn't come with a single moment. I think it comes with the fact that his efforts to get the healthcare plan adopted have consumed so much of his time that he has slowed down his efforts to change American foreign policy.

ARIEL
DORFMAN
Chilean-American Author

Surely, even if there were no conditions for deep, radical transformations, we could have done better. I am most disappointed, in foreign policy, not by Afghanistan (I expected a surge of sorts, no matter how disastrous) but by the woeful mishandling of the Honduras coup, a botched chance to ensure that such adventures were a thing of the past. The best, internationally: Iran has not been bombed (yet!), the interceptor missiles in Poland were canceled, the radar in the Czech

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Republic was not deployed. And Obama's speech in Cairo was inspirational. Words still matter!

Nationally, his highest points may be the rejection of the F-22 bomber, his energy initiatives and all the people (not enough, but each of them is important) who are working because of the stimulus. I was distressed by how easily Van Jones was sacrificed, not only because we need wonderful men like him in the White House but because it is symptomatic of a lack of leadership and fighting spirit on far too many issues—healthcare being perhaps the most salient. Finally: I sent an open letter to Obama (through Amnesty International) asking that those who ordered torture in the name of America be brought to justice—and there has been, up till now, no reply. Lack of words also matter!

ANTONIO
GONZALEZ
President, William C. Velasquez Institute

Naming the first Latina/o to the Supreme Court was definitely the highlight of Barack Obama's first year in office. Both symbolically and substantively meaningful, Justice Sonia Sotomayor's appointment will reverberate for years to come in the consciousness of Latinas and Latinos, who have long yearned for that all too rare commodity in American society—respect. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, Justice Sotomayor will add a common-sense, ethnically aware perspective to the "out of touch" highest court in the land.

An equally obvious choice for lowlight of Obama's first year is his continued delay of a push for justice for 12 million undocumented "indentured servants" in our midst. Having committed to immigration reform that "included legalization" in Obama's first hundred days, the administration shifted that promise to "first year" and now to the spring of 2010. But to repeat the well-known civil rights–era slogan, "Justice delayed is justice denied."

Even the most loyal of Latino Democratic leaders know that facing Latino voters empty-handed on this priority issue in November is a risky proposition.

GLENN C.
LOURY
Professor of the Social Sciences, Brown University

From where I sit, the high point of President Obama's young administration was its inauguration. Much seemed possible on that glorious day, but it has been downhill since. Hope, it would appear, is more easily inspired than it is justified. And those eloquent speeches about change during Obama's historic and euphoric campaign look now to have been precisely what the candidate's detractors said they were—just words.

Specifically, my hope had been that elevating a progressive African-American Democrat to the nation's highest office would do two things: help to bring about an effective engagement with America's unresolved problems of racial inequality, and begin to reverse our headlong march toward a Hundred Years' War with radical Islam. I did not expect these things to happen overnight, but I did expect to see movement in this direction. This administration has shown scant inclination to do either, which is disappointment enough. But worse—far worse—is the likelihood that Obama's failure even to attempt such changes will discredit the very idea that these are worthy objectives for any Democrat.

Obama has said little of substance about racial inequality since moving into the Oval Office, and what he has said leaves much to be desired. His speech to the NAACP convention was a rehash of his by now familiar "family values" homily. His comments on the arrest last summer of a black Harvard professor were shockingly inept. Our black president seems eager to address the American public with passion about the race issue when his "friend" has been mistreated by the police, but not if it means stressing policy reforms that might keep tens of thousands of troubled black men out of prison.

As for the new American militarism, Obama has not really changed the direction in which we are headed. Indeed, and ironically, his speech in Oslo accepting the Nobel Peace Prize attempted to justify American military hegemony as the necessary precondition of global security and prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century. His conduct of the "war on terror" and, most distressing, his escalation of our involvement in Afghanistan's civil war is eerily reminiscent of the approach of his immediate predecessor.

This is not change of any kind, let alone of the kind that we can believe in.

DEEPAK
BHARGAVA
Executive Director, Center for Community Change

The healthcare bill is, for all its flaws, a momentous accomplishment. It is the first major expansion of the federal safety net since the 1960s, and not only extends coverage to more than 30 million Americans but reverses the conservative string of successes in shrinking the role of government. In light of the economic crisis, President Obama had an easy excuse not to pursue a grand healthcare agenda. Indeed, reports are that some of his close advisers told him to play small ball; that he ignored their advice is a credit to his leadership. Though I wish the president had fought harder for key progressive priorities, holding him solely to account for the realities of the Senate (and a closely divided country) is to forget that he is a president, not a magician. Progressives and community organizers can be proud of the role we played. Had we not outmatched the tea-baggers in our advocacy, and pushed hard for the public option, we would have ended up with a thin gruel or perhaps nothing at all.

On the downside, the president has put together an economic team that has delivered for Wall Street but not for hurting communities. Their caution in light of the unfolding unemployment crisis has created the conditions for a right-wing populism that could be the undoing of a progressive agenda for a generation. Unless we force Washington to reverse course and pursue a bold full-employment agenda, the window for big change could close very quickly. The president's odd decision to demobilize his base in 2009 in favor of an insider approach to gover-

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nance was a colossal mistake, and underlines the critical role for independent movements to create political space.

EDITH
CHILDS
County Councilwoman, Greenwood, South Carolina

My greatest moment of excitement was when Obama was given the oath to be the president, not just the black president but the president. He's not just some people's president but president of all of us, commander-in-chief of all of us.

My low moment has been the stimulus. In South Carolina, the money did not get down as far as it should have gotten. We are thankful for what we did get, but it is not as much as I thought we should have gotten. I was hoping we could have done better job-wise.

I still have not, will not, give up on him as president, because I know he came into a lot of challenges from the outset, and it's going to take him a while to correct much of what was there when he became president. I still believe that we're going to get through it. And it's not going to take him alone. It's going to take his staff, and the House and the Senate working with him, as well as people down on the state and local level. As I told President Obama during the campaign, we all be "Fired Up and Ready to Go." We're going to work together and do what we have to do to move forward. And that will be what will get us through this recession.

EDUARDO
GALEANO
Author

The highest points have been his incarnation of the fight against racism, still alive after the long battle for civil rights and his plan for healthcare reform.

The sharpest disappoints:

§ Guantánamo, a universal disgrace

§ Afghanistan, a poisoned chalice, accepted and celebrated

§ His raising of the war budget, still called, who knows why, the defense budget

§ His nonanswer to the climate and yes-man answer to Wall Street, a contradiction captured perfectly on a poster outside the Copenhagen conference: "If the climate were a bank, it would be saved"

§ His green light to the authors of the military coup in Honduras, betraying Latin hopes for change after a century and a half of US-fabricated coups against democracy in the name of democracy

§ His recent speeches praising war, hymns to the ongoing butcheries for oil or the sacred cause of racketeer governments, so utterly divorced from the lively words that put him where he now sits

I don't know. Perhaps Barack Obama is a prisoner. The most powerful prisoner in the world. And perhaps he cannot notice it. So many people are in jail.

KRISHNAN
SUBRAHMANIAN
Former Field Staff, Obama for America

As a medical student, I am most thrilled that health insurance reform is closer to being a reality now than at any point in generations. When the House announced that it had passed a bill, it was an emotional moment as I began to think of the many people on the campaign who told horror stories about their experience with health insurance. I thought of the young mother of two who, lacking health insurance, ignored a pestering stomachache until it presented as a ten-inch tumor. The end of discrimination against pre-existing conditions and the insidious process of rescission is nearly at hand. Reform would expand coverage to include 94 percent of Americans.

This reform is not perfect, and I am sure improvements can and will be made. Current proposals lack a public option, and I am skeptical that pilot programs and comparative effectiveness research alone will yield necessary reductions in healthcare expenditures. Despite imperfections, the president and his team have kept the complicated and unglamorous topic of health insurance reform at the forefront of public discussion and made monumental reform a real possibility.

Disappointment struck me most at a moment that should have been joyful: the presentation of the Nobel Peace Prize to Obama in December, just days after he announced troop escalation in Afghanistan. This paradox highlights the great gulf between the idealism of politics and the reality of government. Just as we had unyielding faith in the campaign, I hope Obama is right on Afghanistan. I hope that 30,000 additional troops can ensure the safety and security of Afghans and Americans. I fear the consequences of his being wrong—for Afghans, for Americans and for our brave men and women in uniform.

I was saddened because the symbol of the peace prize represents for me unambiguous good without the burdens of being politically correct or viable. It is an award of ideals.

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The presidency is an office of problem solving and pragmatism. Watching great ideals settle into the compromise of legislation and governance is a sobering reminder that Obama is no longer a hopeful symbol for so many of us but someone with an incredibly difficult job before him.

HOWARD ZINN

Historian

I've been searching hard for a highlight. The only thing that comes close is some of Obama's rhetoric; I don't see any kind of a highlight in his actions and policies.

As far as disappointments, I wasn't terribly disappointed because I didn't expect that much. I expected him to be a traditional Democratic president. On foreign policy, that's hardly any different from a Republican—as nationalist, expansionist, imperial and warlike. So in that sense, there's no expectation and no disappointment. On domestic policy, traditionally Democratic presidents are more reformist, closer to the labor movement, more willing to pass legislation on behalf of ordinary people—and that's been true of Obama. But Democratic reforms have also been limited, cautious. Obama's no exception. On healthcare, for example, he starts out with a compromise, and when you start out with a compromise, you end with a compromise of a compromise, which is where we are now.

I thought that in the area of constitutional rights he would be better than he has been. That's the greatest disappointment, because Obama went to Harvard Law School and is presumably dedicated to constitutional rights. But he becomes president, and he's not making any significant step away from Bush policies. Sure, he keeps talking about closing Guantánamo, but he still treats the prisoners there as "suspected terrorists." They have not been tried and have not been found guilty. So when Obama proposes taking people out of Guantánamo and putting them into other prisons, he's not advancing the cause of constitutional rights very far. And then he's gone into court arguing for preventive detention, and he's continued the policy of sending suspects to countries where they very well may be tortured.

I think people are dazzled by Obama's rhetoric, and that people ought to begin to understand that Obama is going to be a mediocre president—which means, in our time, a dangerous president—unless there is some national movement to push him in a better direction.

ELLEN MILLER

Executive Director, Sunlight Foundation

The president has established a new, very high standard regarding the use of technology for greater government transparency. He set a high-water mark on his second day in office, and now his early pledge has been followed by the Open Government Directive. It represents a fundamental shift in government's role in making information public, reversing decades during which government held its information close and conducted its policy-making almost entirely behind closed doors. The directive orders each cabinet-level agency to create plans and protocols for the release of government data online in tech- and citizen-friendly formats. It also charges the agencies to begin making data sets available to the public within a short period of time. Already the administration has established data clearinghouses such as data.gov and recovery.gov and dramatically strengthened lobbyist disclosure of contacts with the executive branch. There are positive harbingers.

But the president hasn't invested himself personally in the fight. And it will take his involvement to truly turn the culture of secrecy around. If this unfolds, it has the potential to dramatically alter the way Americans interact with their government. It can break the chokehold that insiders have on Washington, as information is put directly into the hands of citizens.

The administration clearly understands that "public information" means that it's online. This can mean nothing else in the twenty-first century. Now it's our job to hold the administration to its promises.

BENJAMIN JEALOUS

President, NAACP

Barack Obama came to Washington riding a wave of movement activity that had been building for many years. It culminated in his successful insurgent primary battles and presidential campaign. The power of that surge has carried our nation forward on many fronts, including: stemming massive job losses, increasing women's ability to ensure fair treatment in the workplace, rebuilding the Justice Department's ability to protect Americans' basic individual rights and setting the stage for what appears to be the imminent passage of major healthcare reform.

The greatest victory of Obama's first year, in other words, occurred months before it began. It happened when he decided to stitch together the dreams of many stripes of American idealists into one powerful force for change.

The greatest failure of his administration's first year rests in the hands of all of us who are committed to manifesting our nation's dream of liberty and justice for all. In too many instances in the past twelve months we have powered down, left the field for the bleachers and chosen to play armchair pundit rather than continue leading.

Like every great wave, the one that brought change to Washington must be regenerated or it ebbs. More important, our communities' and families' fortunes, which in so many instances were already in perilous condition, will ebb with it. Real change emerges from the collective power of a robust and inspired movement. 2010 must be the year we begin to fight at scale again.

ROBERT CARO

Author

Instead of a high point or a low point, how about a too-early-to-tell point? This is where I think we are during the first year of a four- or eight-year presidency. ■

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System Failure

As welcome as it was, the removal of George W. Bush was not enough to cure what ails us.

by CHRISTOPHER HAYES

There is a widespread consensus that the decade we've just brought to a close was singularly disastrous for the country: the list of scandals, crises and crimes is so long that events that in another context would stand out as genuine lowlights—Enron and Arthur Andersen's collapse, the 2003 Northeast blackout, the unsolved(!) anthrax attacks—are mere afterthoughts. We still don't have a definitive name for this era, though Paul Krugman's 2003 book *The Great Unraveling* captures well the sense of slow, inexorable dissolution; and the final crisis of the era, what we call the Great Recession, similarly expresses the sense that even our disasters aren't quite epic enough to be cataclysmic. But as a character in Tracy Letts's 2007 Pulitzer Prize–winning play, *August: Osage County*, says, "Dissipation is actually much worse than cataclysm."

American progressives were the first to identify that something was deeply wrong with the direction the country was heading in and the first to provide a working hypothesis for the cause: George W. Bush. During the initial wave of antiwar mobilization, in 2002, much of the ire focused on Bush himself. But as the decade stretched on, the causal account of the country's problems grew outward in concentric circles: from Bush to his administration (most significantly, Cheney) to the Republican Party to—finally (and not inaccurately)—the entire project of conservative governance.

As much of the country came to share some version of this view (tenuously, but share it they did), the result was a series of Democratic electoral sweeps and a generation of Americans, the Millennials, with more liberal views than any of their elder cohorts. But it always seemed possible that the sheer reactionary insanity of the Bush administration would have a conservatizing effect on the American polity. Because things had gone so wrong, it was a more than natural reaction to long for the good old days; the Clinton years, characterized by deregulation and bubbles, seemed tantalizingly placid and prosperous in retrospect. The atavistic imperialism of the Bush administration had a way of making the pre-Bush foreign policy of soft imperialism and subtle bullying look positively saintly.

Toward the end of the decade, as the establishment definitively rebuked Bush and sought to distance itself from his failures, the big-tent center-left coalition took on an influential constituency—the Colin Powells and Warren Buffetts—who didn't want reform so much as they wanted restoration. This was reflected in a strange internal tension in the Obama campaign rhetoric that simultaneously promised both: change you can believe in and, as Obama said at a March 2008 appearance in Pennsylvania, a foreign policy that is "actually a return to the traditional bipartisan realistic policy of George Bush's father."

ZINA SAUNDERS

If the working hypothesis that bound this unwieldy coalition together—independents, most liberals and the Washington establishment—was that the nation's troubles were chiefly caused by the occupants of the White House, then this past year has served as a kind of natural experiment. We changed the independent variable (the party and people in power) and can observe the results. It is hard, I think, to come to any conclusion but that the former hypothesis was insufficient.

So what, exactly, is it that ails us?

In pondering the answer, it's useful to distinguish between two separate categories of problems we face. The first are the human, economic and ecological disasters that demand immediate action: a grossly inefficient healthcare sector, millions un- or underinsured, 10 percent unemployment, a planet that's warming, soaring personal bankruptcies, 12 million immigrants working in legal limbo, the list goes on. But the deeper problem, the ultimate cause of many of the first-order problems, is the perverse maldistribution of power in the country: too much in too few hands. It didn't happen overnight, of course, and the devolution has been analyzed and decried by a host of writers and thinkers in these very pages.

It's also not the first time. Indeed, the story of the American Republic is the never-ending task of redistributing power that always seems to collect and pool and re-form, a cycle in which we break up the power trusts, only to find them reassembling, *Terminator 2*–like, and requiring yet another dose

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of the founders' revolutionary fervor to be broken up again.

The central and unique paradox of our politics at this moment, however, is that our institutions are so broken, the government so sclerotic and dysfunctional, that in almost all cases, from financial bailouts to health insurance mandates, the easiest means of addressing the first set of problems is to take steps that exacerbate the second.

As an illustration, consider the following hypothetical.

You're a social worker or a parish priest in a poor urban neighborhood that lives under the malignant, if stable, stewardship of an organized-crime protection racket. The small business owners all have to pay a protection fee, which most of them can afford, but a significant portion of bodegas and nail salons operating on razor-thin profit margins struggle to come up with the money. When they fall short (which is often) they are subjected to beatings, harassment, vandalism and other petty cruelties.

Now, it turns out that you can raise enough money through your organization so that you can reliably cover the protection fees for the struggling shop owners operating on the margins. Whenever they can't come up with enough money, you can make up the difference. The improvement to residents' lives would be massive: no longer forced to live in fear, they would be allowed to transact their business and go about their lives free from the constant, degrading fear of physical violence. But by taking this action you would also be channeling revenue into the pockets of the protection racket and, perhaps more insidious, further entrenching its power by conceding its central premise: that all local businesses must pay up in order to survive.

This is, in rough allegorical fashion, the dilemma at the heart of the recent intra-left battle over the Senate version of the healthcare bill. Those arguing that the bill will be a massive step forward in reducing the misery of the uninsured are for the most part right. And those arguing that the Senate version of the bill is a grotesque sellout to Big Pharma and, to a lesser extent, Big Insurance, are more or less correct as well. When the White House used its muscle to kill a bipartisan amendment that would have allowed reimportation of drugs, it was as if our fictional social worker or priest took to shaking down shopkeepers to stay in the good graces of the local thugs. For what it's worth, I'm generally in the pay-off-the-thugs camp, because of the concrete benefits it would provide (Medicaid expansion for 15 million) but also because by enshrining the notion that the government is responsible for managing the healthcare system, the crimes of the insurance racket can now be laid at the feet of our politicians. In the short run, that accountability may spell political trouble; in the long run, I'm hopeful that it will force the government to crack down.

That said, the whole system that produced this legislative approach sucks, and recalls nothing so much as the Bush/GOP passage of Medicare Part D.

In the abstract, the putative goal of Medicare Part D was laudable (even if it was driven by Karl Rove's crass desire to curry favor with an important electoral demographic): reduce the cost of prescription drugs for seniors on Medicare. The method of achieving this laudable social end, however, was repugnant. Medicare was statutorily barred from using its market share to negotiate lower drug prices, thereby ensuring hefty (and largely unearned) profits for Big Pharma in perpetuity. Drug reimportation was off the table as well. And since Republicans don't believe in taxes, and our political institutions are increasingly incapable of raising revenue, none of it was paid for. One Democratic Senate aide told me that right before his boss voted for final passage of the bill, the senator turned to him and said, "So, I guess I have to go vote for this piece of shit."

At the time, Medicare Part D looked like the nadir of GOP governance, but two things have happened in the interim. One, the program, despite early chaos, has become quite popular: seniors like getting cheaper drugs. And two, the basic policy approach has been adopted, in somewhat altered form, by the Obama administration. We are all Medicare Part D now.

There's a word for a governing philosophy that fuses government and large corporations as a means of providing services: corporatism.

There's a word for a governing philosophy that fuses the power of government and large corporations as a means of providing services and keeping the wheels of industry greased, and it's a word that has begun to pop up among critics of everything from the TARP bailout to healthcare to cap and trade: corporatism. Since corporatism often merges the worst parts of Big Government and Big Business, it's an ideal target for both the left and right. The ultimate corporatist moment, the bailout, was initially voted down in the House by an odd-bedfellows coalition of Progressive Caucus members and right-wingers.

In the wake of the healthcare sausage-making, writers from Tim Carney on the right (author of the provocative *Obamanomics*) and Glenn Greenwald on the left have attacked the bill as the latest incarnation of corporatism, a system they see as the true enemy. There is even some talk among activists of a grand left-right populist coalition coming together to depose the entrenched interests that hold sway in Washington. Jane Hamsher of Firedoglake touted her work with libertarians to oppose Ben Bernanke, more AIG bailouts and the Senate healthcare bill ("What we agree on: both parties are working against the interests of the public, the only difference is in the messaging"); David McKalip, the tea-party doctor who got into trouble for forwarding an image of Obama with a bone through his nose, wrote an open letter to the netroots proposing that they join him in fighting the "real enemy," the "unholy corporate/government cabal that will control your healthcare."

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I don't think that coalition is going to emerge in any meaningful form. The right's anger is born largely of identity-based alienation, a fear of socialism (whatever *that* means nowadays) and an age-old Bircher suspicion that "they" are trying to screw "us." Even in its most sophisticated forms, such as in Carney's *Obamanomics*, the basic right-wing argument against corporatism embraces a kind of fatalism about government that assumes it will always devolve into a rat's nest of rent seekers and cronies and therefore should be kept as small as possible.

But the progressive critics hold that we can and should do better. The Medicare Part D model is a terrible way of running a government for a number of reasons. First, and most practical, it's expensive. When paying off protection rackets is the price of passing legislation, you have to come up with a lot more money. Allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices would have saved the government as much as $30 billion a year. The strong public option would, according to the Congressional Budget Office, save $85 billion over ten years. Once everyone has laid claim to their vig, you soon find yourself tapped out.

The second problem is that this form of governance degrades the integrity of the state. Historian Tony Judt made this point eloquently in his October 19 lecture "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Social Democracy." Delegating fundamental state activities to private actors, he said, "discredits the state." Instead of a straightforward relationship between citizen and state, we have a mediated one that has the potential to perversely feed the anti-statist arguments of the right as the state becomes, in Judt's words, "represented in the popular mind by a grasping private profiteer."

But the corporatism on display in Washington is itself a symptom of a broader social illness that I noted above, a democracy that is pitched precariously on the tipping point of oligarchy. In an oligarchy, the only way to get change is to convince the oligarchs that it is in their interest—and increasingly, that's the only kind of change we can get.

In 1911 the German democratic socialist Robert Michels faced a similar problem, and it was the impetus for his classic book *Political Parties*. He was motivated by a simple question: why were parties of the left, those most ideologically committed to democracy and participation, as oligarchical in their functioning as the self-consciously elitist and aristocratic parties of the right?

Michels's answer was what he called "The Iron Law of Oligarchy." In order for any kind of party or, indeed, any institution with a democratic base to exist, it must have an organization that delegates tasks. As this bureaucratic structure develops, it invests a small group of people with enough power that they can then subvert the very mechanisms by which they can be held to account: the party press, party conventions and delegate votes. "It is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors," he wrote, "of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization, says oligarchy."

Michels recognized the challenge his work presented to his comrades on the left and viewed the task of democratic socialists as a kind of noble, endless, Sisyphean endeavor, which he described by invoking a German fable. In it, a dying peasant tells his sons that he has buried a treasure in their fields. "After the old man's death the sons dig everywhere in order to discover the treasure. They do not find it. But their indefatigable labor improves the soil and secures for them a comparative well-being."

"The treasure in the fable may well symbolize democracy," Michels wrote. "Democracy is a treasure which no one will ever discover by deliberate search. But in continuing our search, in laboring indefatigably to discover the undiscoverable, we shall perform a work which will have fertile results in the democratic sense."

After a rather dispiriting few months, the treasure in this case may seem impossibly remote, but one thing the Obama campaign got right was its faith in America's history of continually and fruitfully tilling the soil of democracy, struggling against odds until, at certain moments of profound progressive change, a new treasure is improbably found.

It was the possibility of such a democratic unearthing that gave Obama for America its moral force. The most inspiring thing about the campaign had nothing to do with the candidate and everything to do with average citizens from Dubuque to Atlanta who were taking the time and energy to search for a small piece of that treasure. Likewise, the message of the Obama campaign was as much about empowerment, reinvigorating democracy and changing the ways of Washington as it was about the central planks of his agenda. It's for this reason that the greatest disappointment of his first year is the White House's abandonment of this small-d democratic impulse in favor of a strategy almost wholly focused on insider politics.

What the country needs more than higher growth and lower unemployment, greater income equality, a new energy economy and drastically reduced carbon emissions is a redistribution of power, a society-wide epidemic of re-democratization. The crucial moments of American reform and progress have achieved this: from the direct election of senators to the National Labor Relations Act, from the breakup of the trusts to the end of Jim Crow.

So in this new year, while the White House focuses on playing within the existing rules, it's our job as citizens and activists to press constantly for changes to those rules: public financing, an end to the filibuster, the breakup of the banks, legalization for undocumented workers and the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act, to name just a few of the measures that would alter the balance of power and expand the frontiers of the possible.

If I had to bet, I'd say that not of one of these will be won this year. The White House won't be of much help, and on some issues, like breaking up the banks, it will represent the opposition. Always searching and never quite finding is grueling and often dispiriting work. But there is simply no alternative other than to give in and let the field turn hard and barren. ■

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The Professional

Like the Progressives, Obama seems to believe government can move beyond partisan politics.

by ERIC FONER

ZINA SAUNDERS

The first year may not be the best way to judge a president. After one year in office, Abraham Lincoln still insisted that slavery would not become a target of the Union war effort, Franklin D. Roosevelt had yet to address the need for social insurance in the wake of the Great Depression and John F. Kennedy viewed the civil rights movement as an annoying distraction. If we admire them today, it is mostly for what happened during the rest of their presidencies.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to view Obama's initial year without a feeling of deep disappointment. This arises from more than unrealistic expectations, although his candidacy certainly aroused a great deal of wishful thinking among those yearning for a change after nearly thirty years of Reaganism. Nor does disappointment result from too exacting a standard of judgment. In fact, the bar has arguably been set too low. Too many of us have been willing to fall back on a comparison between Obama and his predecessor, arguably the worst president in American history, and leave it at that.

Not surprisingly, given the global economic crisis, numerous observers greeted Obama's election by comparing him to FDR. This was a serious error. Obama is not a New Deal liberal. Rather, his outlook reflects how the preoccupations of liberalism have changed under the impact of the social and political transformations since the 1930s.

Obama came of age politically at a time when the decline of the labor movement had eroded one social base of liberalism while new ones were emerging from the upheavals of the 1960s and the changing racial and ethnic composition of the American population. Personally, he embodies the rise to prominence in the Democratic Party of highly educated professionals, including a new black upper middle class that emerged from the struggles of the '60s and subsequent affirmative action programs. He is also closely identified with what might be called the more forward-looking wing of Wall Street, which contributed heavily to his campaign and to which he has entrusted his economic policy.

Obama has no evident desire to address the questions that defined New Deal liberalism and remain all too relevant today—economic inequality; mass unemployment; unrestrained corporate power; and the struggle of workers, through unions, to enjoy "industrial democracy." Where Obama has been good is on issues that were subordinate themes during the 1930s but have become central to post–World War II liberalism—women's reproductive rights, respect for civil liberties and the rule of law, environmentalism and racial and ethnic diversity, especially in government employment.

Obama also embodies a strain of thought alien to the New Deal but associated with the Progressivism of the early twentieth century, the desire to take politics out of the hands of politicians. Like the old Progressives, he seems to believe that the government can move beyond partisan politics to operate in a businesslike manner to promote the public good (despite clear evidence that the other side is not cooperating). As in the Progressive Era, this outlook goes hand in hand with a strong respect for scientific expertise (quite different from George W. Bush's approach).

Listing these characteristics of Obama's thinking makes it clear that the president he most resembles is not FDR or Abraham Lincoln, as was frequently suggested before his inauguration, but Jimmy Carter. Like Carter, Obama seems to view economic globalization and American deindustrialization as an inevitable process and to see the role of government as seeking to mitigate their destructive impact. Like Carter, he has gone out of his way to appoint a racially diverse administration. Like Carter, he does not have an industrial policy or a robust jobs-creation program and seems uninterested in addressing the hardships and structural imbalances caused by the decline of manufacturing.

Obama's economic program reflects and, indeed, reinforces the long-term shift from manufacturing to finance in the American economy. And his bailout of the banks and insurance mega-company AIG with no strings attached has aroused resentments that should not be ignored, even if they are often couched in extreme and racist language. There is a widespread sense that the rules of the game have been fixed to the advantage of the wealthy and that the government is indifferent to the plight of ordinary Americans. Ironically, for all the blacks appointed to highly visible positions in Washington, the condition of most African-Americans has worsened during Obama's first year. Blacks have suffered disproportionately from the decline of manufacturing employment and mortgage foreclosures. It is unlikely that an avowedly postracial president will directly address their plight.

On foreign policy, the parallels with Carter are even closer, down to a joint preoccupation with Afghanistan. Both Carter and Obama reoriented the rhetoric of American foreign pol-

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icy toward international cooperation, yet found it difficult to translate this ideal into practice. Carter continued to support tyrants like the Shah of Iran, launched a military buildup that paved the way for Reagan's and reinvigorated the cold war after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. As for Obama, his recent address on Afghanistan and his surprisingly bellicose speech accepting the Nobel Peace Prize reveal that he has comfortably embraced the role of wartime president, even adopting Bush-like language about a titanic global confrontation between the forces of evil and those of freedom. This has reignited the martial spirit of the liberal interventionists, who applauded the invasion of Iraq, later apologized (more or less) and now praise Obama's supposed "realism" in recognizing that wars are sometimes necessary. Only "just wars," of course. But was there ever a war its combatants did not consider just?

One lesson we should learn from Obama's first year is the difficulty of effecting change, even in times of crisis. Fearful of popular democracy, the men who wrote the Constitution created a government system designed to make it far easier to prevent change than to implement it. Today this structural inertia is compounded by the power of money in politics and by an entrenched military establishment. Obama has failed to heed the lesson Kennedy learned from the Bay of Pigs debacle at the outset of his presidency—not to accept at face value the advice of his generals (a realization that served Kennedy and the world well during the Cuban missile confrontation of 1962).

A crisis, however, also creates an opportunity. To seize it, the first prerequisite is to "disenthrall ourselves" from accepted maxims, as Lincoln urged Americans to do in 1862. "As our case is new," he said, "so we must think anew and act anew." Obama still has plenty of time to do this. It was only after their first year that Lincoln became the Great Emancipator, FDR the architect of the Second New Deal and Kennedy a champion of civil rights. Not one of these presidents acted simply on his own volition. All three were pressured to change by engaged social movements—abolitionists, the labor movement, the struggle for racial justice.

Given this country's tortured racial history, Obama's election will always represent a symbolic watershed. To make sure that it amounts to more than this, progressives must stop making excuses or falling back on extenuating circumstances in assessing Obama. Without forgetting the differences between Obama and his increasingly retrograde Republican opposition, we must reject the outdated assumptions to which Obama clings on economic and foreign policy and forthrightly press for genuine change, speaking truth to power even when that power is held by men and women we helped put into office. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

nied Kestral's forces on raids in Pakistan. Surely Douglas was in a position to deny that arrangement, and yet, conspicuously, he didn't. A former Blackwater executive with direct knowledge of the arrangement told *The Nation* that Blackwater's owner, Erik Prince, is a close friend of Kestral's owner, Ali Baig. Douglas says nothing about that. Instead, he baselessly accuses me of a "reckless and potentially deadly" attack on Baig and Kestral. What does Douglas say about the wisdom of Kestral and "its distinguished CEO," Baig, cavorting with the likes of Prince and Blackwater, a firm that has assisted the lethal US drone bombing that has killed scores of Pakistani civilians?

Douglas claims the United States' work with Kestral is perfectly transparent; yet when *The Nation* attempted to get comments or information from the government and the military, we were told bluntly, "We cannot help you." Kestral did not respond to repeated requests for comment, nor did Kestral's US lobbyist, Roger Noriega, agree to provide any comment.

Douglas suggests that I should "commend" Kestral for its work in Pakistan. That is not the job of journalists. It is to hold the US government, the military and its contractors accountable. I stand by my story.
JEREMY SCAHILL

Taxi Driver

W. ST. PAUL, MINN.
As I read José Manuel Prieto's "Travels by Taxi" [Dec. 14], I felt like the cabbie who asked his passenger (our author) what country he was from. When the author told him, he exclaimed "Cuba?" and then "Fidel Castro!" The cabbie then expressed his approval by "striking the palm of his hand with his left fist: 'He gave to the Americans up the ass.'" All the hypocrisy of Cuba's northern adversaries, from Eisenhower to Obama, was exposed. He mooned them all. Brilliant essay, thank you.
RICHARD J. GARCIA

LOS ANGELES
José Manuel Prieto offers no facts, only a stream of vitriol and a longing for the idyllic days of Batista, when (some) Cubans lived like (some) Americans and nobody feared the secret police. He marvels that humble people like taxi drivers, all over the world, offer enthusiastic support for Fidel and the Cuban Revolution as a symbol of resistance to the oppression and miseries of imperialism. Surely the Cuban Revolution has faults, many of them due to the fifty years of hostility and siege by the colossus to the north.
ARIS ANAGNOS

FORT WASHINGTON, MD.
My husband and I were stationed at the US Embassy from August 1959 till January 1961, and from July 1979 to May 1982. Prieto's essay is the best description of what has happened to Cuba and the Cuban people I have ever read.
ROXANNA P. SMITH

BRONX, N.Y.
If I wanted to read articles like this, I would subscribe to *The American Standard*, *The New Republic*, etc. The Cuban system is not ideal, but it's the result of an evolution imposed by US policies aimed at destroying the revolution that ended Cuba's status as a US colony. The Empire succeeded in overthrowing the democratic government of Allende in Chile but failed in Cuba. Maybe Castro did the right things.
GEORGE B. SIGAL

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Books & the Arts.

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY, NYC

909-6 Abstract Painting (2009), by Gerhard Richter

Evasive Action Painter

by BARRY SCHWABSKY

Sometimes you go to an exhibition not for pleasure but duty. It might be a little like going to visit an old uncle. You know he needs the company, and your affection for him remains undiminished, but you've heard all his stories and his complaints too often. I went to Gerhard Richter's recent exhibition at the Marian Goodman Gallery in New York City in something like that spirit.

Partly it's the curse of the big exhibition. Maybe Richter's 2002 retrospective at MoMA exhausted my curiosity, all the more so because it seemed to come a few years too late. Richter had been, arguably, the world's most influential painter from the mid-'80s or so—once the tide of Neo-Expressionism had begun to recede—throughout the '90s, but as that decade reached its end, his influence had begun to seem too pervasive, his style too familiar. His very authority as an artist, along with his immense productivity, made him seem (not unlike Picasso in his day) ubiquitous as well as distant from the concerns of younger artists—a museum piece, in the negative sense. And the few exhibitions of his I had seen in the meantime—not to mention the isolated works that dotted the art fairs like so many trophies—had done little to challenge this impression. Certainly his 2008 exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London, "4900 Colours: Version II"—an extension of the color chart theme to which Richter has returned periodically since 1966—seemed like a literalization of the idea of painting as marking time, and of artistic production as little more than meaningless saturation of the environment.

How wrong I was. At least the experience of heading unenthusiastically uptown to Marian Goodman will serve me as a good reminder: by all means do your duty, if only because it might turn out to be a greater pleasure than you could ever have expected. The exhibition was breathtaking—but more about that later. After seeing it, I eagerly turned to a couple of new books on the artist, only to learn a different lesson: don't let your enthusiasm run away with you.

The more enlightening of the two books

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is *Gerhard Richter: Writings 1961–2007* (D.A.P.; $55). It replaces an earlier collection, published in 1995 and now out of print, which for a long time was one of the books you were most likely to find in young painters' studios—in part, I suspect, because its title spoke to them so clearly: *The Daily Practice of Painting* was like a promise that the constant pursuit of the art, the everyday doing of it, might be more important than all the theory in the world, despite the fact that Richter had become the theorists' favorite painter—especially among those who barely deigned to acknowledge, otherwise, that painting is still a viable pursuit. I suspect the new book may not have the same impact, not only because of its poker-faced title—which is also misleading, since the book mainly consists of interviews, which are generally more engaging than the few writings—but because it is now too much of a good thing. Richter has given a great many interviews since 1995, and not all of them are required reading. A more judicious selection might have been useful, especially because Richter is such a slippery character. Nearly any statement he makes can be matched with one that says the opposite. Perhaps this equivocation or deniability is one source of Richter's success, his ability to represent so many different, possibly contradictory things to so many people; it's certainly a characteristic of his art and not just of what he says about it.

One might have hoped that Dietmar Elger's *Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting* (Chicago; $45) would put the chameleonlike painter into perspective, but no such luck. Anyway, the book isn't so much a biography as a chronicle of Richter's career as an artist. If you're interested in tracing the responses of the German press to Richter's exhibitions, this is the book for you. If you're more interested in tracking the various phases of the art itself—the paintings of black-and-white photos, of color charts, gray monochromes, intensely colored abstractions, photographically derived paintings in color, not to mention *Atlas*, his archive of photographs, which is both a work and a resource—you'll get some important detail from the book, but you still might be better off looking through a couple of the heavily illustrated catalogs of any of Richter's many retrospectives. But if you think a biography means a book that offers insight into the inner life of its subject, forget it. Someday Richter will have his Hilary Spurling or his John Richardson, but he's probably happy to reflect that he will never have to read it: "Biographical details have limited relevance when it comes to understanding a work of art." There's some truth to that, but only some. There are broadly two things one wants to understand about a painting: first of all, how should I look at it, what should I look for in it? And second, how did someone get to the point of being able, and of needing, to make it? In addressing the first question, biography is perhaps of limited use. For the second, it is essential. But the catch is that, because artworks, unlike the beauties of nature, are always imbued with intention—if only the intention to deflect one's intentionality and allow things to manifest themselves as if naturally—the two questions are really one.

> Richter insists that his earlier professions of neutrality were attempts to be left alone.

Elger's lack of inquisitiveness weakens even the most biographically substantial parts of his book, such as the opening chapter on Richter's childhood in Dresden during the Nazi era and his young manhood in East Germany. He points out that the artist's parents had an unhappy marriage; Horst Richter was drafted in 1939 and spent the entire war in the army and then in an American POW camp, returning to a wife who considered him a failure and children who hardly knew him. The painter sees this situation of fatherlessness as typical of his generation of Germans, and it has left its traces on his subject matter—think of the doleful pantheon of white (or, rather, gray) European men in his *48 Portraits*, from 1972—but more nebulously in the pervasive sense of melancholy that has marked much of his work, as well as in his discomfort with authority. But only in passing, in one of the interviews in *Writings* rather than in the biography, does one learn that Horst Richter was not Gerhard's biological father.

Richter has always sought order in his life, and he works in an orderly way. Elger (a former secretary in Richter's studio and now a curator at the Dresden State Art Collections and director of its Gerhard Richter Archive) mentions that as a student at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1961–64 Richter arrived at his studio every morning at 8, carrying a briefcase, like a businessman. No matter that it merely contained his lunch. Yet he seems regularly to have been attracted to those who flout the rules. His closest friendship from the academy was with a remarkable painter who took the name Blinky Palermo, a drug addict who died under mysterious circumstances in 1977 at 33. It's clear from the interviews how much Richter still misses him. One longs to understand this friendship more deeply. Similarly, one would like to know much more about Richter's second marriage, to another remarkable artist a generation younger than himself, the sculptor Isa Genzken. It is well-known in the art world that this brilliant woman, who represented Germany at the Venice Biennale in 2007, has struggled with mental illness. Elger makes no mention of it. One former art dealer has published reminiscences like this: "I last saw her in New York in the wee hours on the dance floor of a Chelsea disco. Later she moved to Berlin, and soon had been banned from clubs and bars for her agitated behavior. I heard she was screaming: 'fascist' at customers and I saw her dead drunk sleeping on the demonstration furniture of a design store in the middle of Wittenberger Platz." Perhaps knowing this merely satisfies the craving for gossip, as Richter would say; yet I would wager that his attraction to someone who was capable of such behavior (though the time eventually came when he could no longer handle it; he is now married to his third wife) reflects an intensity of his own, held in check only by his blessed rage for order. Richter later recalled Genzken as a "very strict" critic: "'That's ugly, terrible,' she'd say." Wouldn't it have been worth trying to get a deeper sense of those conversations, and of the mark Genzken's strictures might have left on Richter's work afterward?

The impersonality of Elger's presentation echoes Richter's discretion. Yet these days the artist seems less enamored of his former pose of impersonality and removal. In the past he repeatedly let it be known that the imagery in his paintings—mostly derived from news photographs and other such publicly available images—had no personal significance. Notes written in 1964–65 make him sound like Andy Warhol, wanting to disappear into the common consciousness: "I want to be like everyone else, think what everyone else thinks, do what is being done anyway." Using found photographs was the key to this disappearance: the photograph "had no style, no composition, no judgment. It freed me from personal experience." Likewise the choice of subjects was supposed to be neutral: "Perhaps the choice is a nega-

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tive one, in that I was trying to avoid everything that touched on well-known issues—or any issues at all, whether painterly, social or aesthetic. I tried to find nothing too explicit, hence all the banal subjects; and then, again, I tried to avoid letting the banal turn into my issue and my trademark. So it's all evasive action, in a way."

Yet among the paintings made from found photographs, there were always a few taken from family snapshots. How could those, at least, ever have been chosen quite so impersonally? Later Richter would change his story. Asked by Benjamin Buchloh in 1986, "So what were the criteria by which you chose photographs for your iconography?" he answered, "Content, definitely—though I may have denied this at one time, by saying that it had nothing to do with content, because it was supposed to be all about copying a photograph and giving a demonstration of indifference.... I looked for photographs that showed my present life, the things that related to me." Why did he pretend to indifference? Self-protection, he insists. Again and again, he says that his earlier professions of neutrality were essentially attempts to be left alone, to be able to work in peace.

Of course, Richter's aim was just as much to mislead himself as anyone else. We see this in an anecdote from a 2005 interview for *Der Spiegel*, in which he refers to an early painting of his father, *Horst With Dog* (1965): "When I painted it, I just thought it was funny.... But when I saw it displayed in New York thirty years later, I was a little shocked because it seemed to me that the father was portrayed as a predominantly tragic figure." If Richter ever really saw this painting as amusing, his capacity for self-deception is truly impressive. But today, one has to wonder what Richter's new mask of (relative) openness might be hiding. What if his former sense of his father as funny was not unconsciousness but cruelty?

Richter's passionate effort to maintain artistic autonomy at all cost, and to remain free of ideology, has been central to his life and work from the time he crossed over from East Germany to the West in 1961. In notes from November 1989—just days before the Berlin Wall was breached—Richter writes of a "survival strategy" involving "denial of the planning, the opinion and the world-view whereby social projects, and subsequently 'big pictures', are created." This is the typical postcommunist allergy to utopian projects. But his stance is also antipolitical: "Politics operates more by faith than by enlightenment, so nothing is going to come of that." Wherever Richter has faced an ideological demand, he has seen it as a threat. In his notes and interviews he is constantly railing against ideology. When an interviewer contrasts Richter's work with that of a painter who stayed in the East and found success under the communist regime, remarking, "Resistance to any kind of instrumentalization gives your pictures a completely different motivation," he responds, "I certainly did not want to demonstrate resistance because that would have meant countenancing that very instrumentalization. I just want to paint pictures."

Richter has certainly been painting pictures. The exhibition at Marian Goodman included forty-seven works, not all entirely abstract despite its title, dated from 2005 through 2009 (along with a single painting from 1976). One of them, a set of forty-eight small diptychs painted behind glass, could have been a small exhibition in itself. The quantity of work on view, incidentally, evoked another issue unaddressed by Elger's biography: the nuts and bolts of studio practice. Even for an artist as industrious as Richter, one has to wonder how he produces so much (and at such a high level). Some speculate that the abstract paintings, though probably not the now much rarer figurative ones, may be largely the work of assistants. There'd be nothing wrong with that. It's common in today's art. Everyone knows that Bridget Riley, for instance, has not set her hand to one of her canvases since 1961. It makes sense because the facture of her paintings is entirely impersonal. Spontaneity and chance have been abolished. That's not so of Richter's abstract paintings. Each is a compendium of miraculously controlled accidents. One would like to know more about the physical process of their making, including any division of labor involved.

Richter's abstract paintings are compendiums of miraculously controlled accidents.

But back to that set of glass paintings. *Hinterglasmalerei* is an old folk-art tradition that has now and again been taken up by modern artists, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky among them, as well as, in recent years, the English artist Simon Periton. There's nothing folksy about Richter's use of the medium. *Sindbad* (2008) is not the most important work in the show, though it consumes the most wall space; but it's one that you have to come to terms with if you really want to understand Richter. That's not easy, because it represents a side of his work that is hard to warm to—I was tempted to say impossible, but art lovers are an unfathomable lot. Its colors are brash, garish and arbitrary, more like those of Richter's abstractions of the late '70s through the mid-'80s than his work of recent years. These aggressively ingratiating, cheerfully clashing hues are really hard to take. As with his color charts— represented in this exhibition by the small square *25 Colors* (2007)—they represent the perversely antithetical stance toward color that has periodically been his: to reach the neutrality of gray by forcing bright colors into a situation where they neutralize each other. But because each of the ninety-six panels that make up the work is a little bigger than a sheet of letter-size paper, and because the paint is sealed away behind glass, their ferocious neutrality is in itself neutralized and contained. Rather than overwhelming you, as Richter's abstractions of the early '80s might have, their intensity gets under your skin retroactively, after you thought you were already thinking about something else.

Most of the abstract paintings Richter has been making of late are not like that. They use or are dominated by a limited number of colors, and by moving these colors back and forth across the canvas so that they sometimes mix and sometimes emerge separately, Richter almost automatically evokes a specific atmosphere, a mood, a condition of light and space. In that sense they are closer to traditional painting, no matter whether abstract or not, than a work like *Sindbad* is. And yet their very profusion, and the fact that they have been produced by semi-mechanical means, with the paint moved around by a squeegee, suggests that at another level the same arbitrariness is at work in these paintings as in the color charts, the early abstractions or *Sindbad*. For works like those, as Richter wrote to Buchloh in 1977, the premise is that "I can communicate nothing, that there is nothing to communicate, that painting can never be communication, that neither hard work, obstinacy, lunacy nor any trick whatever is going to make the absent message emerge of its own accord from the painting process." Not surprisingly, Richter soon discovered that a message does emerge from the painting process, that something is com-

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municated. In most of his current abstract paintings, which somehow manage to assert themselves as sheer obdurate matter and radiant quanta of space and light at the same time, he allows that message to emerge—but washes his hands of it. It's not *his* message but rather something that occurs almost naturally. "Using chance is like painting nature," Richter has written. "No ideology. No religion, no belief, no meaning, no imagination, no invention, no creativity, no hope—but painting like nature, painting as change, becoming, emerging, being-there, thusness."

In one thought Richter goes from nihilism to Romanticism. Likewise in his painting. And if his hope of painting in a way that parallels the processes of nature seems to echo Jackson Pollock's famous boast when asked whether he worked from nature—"I am nature!"—it's no accident. Commentators on Richter's abstract paintings have often emphasized the radical distinction between them and the work of the Abstract Expressionists, with which they might superficially seem to have much in common. After all, the apparent spontaneity of Richter's paintings is not based on the immediacy of the artist's gesture, as with Pollock or Franz Kline, but is highly mediated, not only by his hands-off working methods but by his basic tendency to subsume the space of painting to that of photography rather than of nature. True enough. But in this case, the superficial view contains more truth than the sophisticated one. The most powerful works in the Goodman show were several very large paintings whose surfaces were nearly white, though of a quasi-white highly variegated, with a great deal of color within or beneath it, surfacing in ghostly demarcations. Contrary to what Buchloh claims in his catalog essay, they bear little or no connection to the Neo-Dada tradition of Robert Rauschenberg's white paintings of 1951 or Piero Manzoni's "achromes" of the late '50s. In these paintings, Richter achieved, as he has rarely if ever done before, an effect of sublimity such as commentators on the Abstract Expressionists often speak of, though the painters achieved it but rarely. Read Richter's notes again with this in mind and you'll realize that he sounds like a painter of the 1940s more often than you'd imagine. When he speaks of painting as "an almost blind, desperate effort, like that of a person abandoned, helpless, in totally incomprehensible surrounding," it might as well be Willem de Kooning talking. Richter's best works might surpass any but the greatest of the Abstract Expressionists, but that's not because his project is radically different from theirs. It's because his is theirs *in extremis*, pursued with a deep-seated suspicion of its impossibility and an even more vigilantly maintained No. It's the drama (and dramatization) of that self-consciousness that's so exhilarating. ■

Permanent Exile

by MADISON SMARTT BELL

For the last thirty years of the twentieth century, Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Amour, colère et folie* was legendary for being lost. Published in France by Gallimard in 1968, this triptych of thematically linked novellas soon caused alarming ripples in the author's native Haiti, where the Vieux-Chauvet family had already lost three of its members to the regime of state terror erected by François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, beginning in 1957. Warned that the book would almost certainly provoke serious reprisals, Vieux-Chauvet persuaded Gallimard to withdraw it, while she went into permanent exile in New York City, where she died in 1973 at 57. Her husband, Pierre Chauvet, made an emergency trip to Haiti, where he purchased as many copies of the book already in circulation there as he could recover—in order to destroy them. Remnants of the Gallimard edition were discreetly sold by Vieux-Chauvet's children, in very few venues, until the stock was exhausted in 2000, and a pirated edition made a shadowy appearance in 2003. But otherwise the book was virtually impossible to find until its republication in France by Zellige in 2005.

Love, Anger, Madness
A Haitian Trilogy.
By Marie Vieux-Chauvet.
Translated by Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur.
Modern Library. 379 pp. $27.

Is the artifact worth such a weight of suffering and struggle? Whether any work of art can ever be worth even a single human life is a question that will never be settled—but this book is surely a masterpiece. Within the community of Haitian writers and writers of the Haitian diaspora it has been prized not only for its rarity but also for its great literary power. In her succinct introduction to the present edition, Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat ranks Vieux-Chauvet among a "multigenerational triad" of the greatest Haitian writers (including Jacques Roumain and Jacques Stephen Alexis) and dubs the trilogy "the cornerstone of Haitian literature." Backed by such accolades, and now available in both French and English, *Amour, colère et folie* can take the central place it deserves in late-twentieth-century Haitian letters. If Duvalierism is the central political experience of the end of the Haitian twentieth century, the psychology of those oppressed by it has never been more compellingly rendered than here.

The three narratives that compose this volume have no continuity of plot from one to the next and no common characters. However, they reflect one another in tone, mood and theme sufficiently to integrate the book as a larger whole—a continuum describing the reactions of different classes of people to a generally similar experience of invasion and oppression from without their households, and a suffocating claustrophobia within. *Love* is the longest and most realistic narrative; *Madness* is more surreal and much shorter. Standing between them, *Anger* (which might have been translated better as "Wrath") has the structure and feeling of Greek tragedy without echoing any particular Greek play in terms of specific characters or plot lines.

Love is set within the community of "aristocrats," to which Vieux-Chauvet belonged: a comparatively small group of mixed European and African blood, which, since the Haitian Revolution ended in 1804, has preserved, as if in amber, the eighteenth-century French acculturation it received during the colonial period. These *milat*, as they are called (a term that derives from the uncomplimentary "mulatto" but in the Haitian context conveys wealth, education and social standing as much or more than pigmentation), have in reality always been a thin, fragile, creamy layer floating uneasily at the top of the vast black Haitian majority. For most of Haiti's history, the often but not always light-skinned elite has been able to concentrate a great deal of the country's wealth and a disproportionate share of political power; but in *Love* its position is felt to be threatened by the rise of a move-

Madison Smartt Bell, a novelist, is the author of Toussaint Louverture: A Biography *(Pantheon).*

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ment based on black power, which resembles nothing so much as the Duvalier regime, though Chauvet does make the faint self-protective gesture of setting the story in 1939, eighteen years before Duvalier took the presidency.

The eldest of three sisters, who all inhabit the home of their dead parents, is Claire, the de facto head of her household and a self-described "old maid," though by no means settled into that condition but rather, as she puts it, "clutching this starving, virgin sex between my legs." Chatelaine and keeper of the keys, she hoards romance novels and pornographic postcards in her always locked bedroom, where she rocks a doll as if it were her infant, pining for the love of the Frenchman Jean Luze, who passed her over to marry her younger sister Félicia, now pregnant with his child. But it is the youngest sister, Annette, who actually seduces Jean Luze, as if urged on by Claire's mute surge of longing. Caught by Félicia, Jean Luze abandons the affair, whereupon Annette attempts suicide with sleeping pills and then, once she recovers, resumes the life of empty promiscuity she had previously led.

The claustrophobia of this situation is to some extent self-inflicted, a Haitian example of the tyranny of bourgeois mores, enforced by gossip among old wives and old maids. To be a middle-aged virgin, Claire announces at the outset, is "the unenviable fate of most women in small Haitian towns." Exceptions are perhaps not wholly enviable: Félicia, betrayed by her husband; Annette, abruptly dumped by Jean Luze; or Jane Bavière, a neighbor and friend of Claire's presumed by the gossips to be a prostitute because she is the unwed mother of a single son. Claire's only resistance is a torrent of words spilling out of her like vomit: "All private lives are alike. Why would you be different from me? Suffocating fear makes freaks of all of us. That's why we take shelter behind a façade. When the façade crumbles, we are handed over to merciless judges worse than we are.... For fear of scandal, I have repressed an ocean of love within me.... My mating season has expired. I am a desert without refuge. It's too late for me to start living. And yet everything lives around me as if to sharpen my regret, even the insects."

The choking fear imposed by society is amplified by a more concrete and more visceral threat: a new and hostile political regime personified by black Calédu, the new commandant of this unnamed small town, whose name recalls the French colonist Caradeux, renowned for his imaginative cruelty to his slaves. For no other reason than that she draws her skirts away from him, Calédu takes another of Claire's neighbors, the pious virgin Dora, to his headquarters to be beaten and gang-raped. Though somewhat euphemistically expressed, the rape is unmistakable, and for a long time afterward Dora "hobbles along with legs spread apart like a maimed animal." "Snobs," Dora reports Calédu shouting as he assaults her, "mulatto snobs, I'll make cripples of all of you, you snobs."

The anxieties here are not only sexual but racial, and race plays a pathological part in Claire's acutely unhappy family history. Félicia is "light-skinned with bland blond hair and the delicate features of a white woman," and "Annette is white too," though with "gold under her skin." But Claire is much darker; and her unmistakably African origin is a social liability, or so perceived by her. Complimented by a suitor as a "black goddess," she flees and locks herself in her room, and in a series of similar events she imprisons herself, again and again, in her so loathed virginity. When Annette, rebounding from her suicide attempt, decides to marry a lower-class man darker than herself, Félicia cries out in shock, "A black man!" (The French term used would have been accurately translated as "Negro.") "A black man in our family.... Can you believe this?"

In Haiti, race hatred is understood as a mask for class hatred, and in Claire's community the old social order has been turned upside down; Calédu's enforcers, analogous to Duvalier's Tonton Macoutes (a group of paramilitary thugs often recruited from the lowest strata of Haitian society), are contemptuously, fearfully described by Claire as "armed beggars." To the humiliation of this situation, which constantly threatens to express itself in rape, is added, in the background, the rape of the land. The American businessman Mr. Long (Jean Luze's employer) collaborates with Calédu to force the clear-cutting of the hills where coffee recently grew, "a bloodbath" as Claire puts it: "Immense trees fell to the ground with what sounded like a great roar before their dying breath.... When the wood is gone, he will go after something else. The slave trade, perhaps."

ANTHONY PHELPS

Marie Vieux-Chauvet

Ironic as it may seem to title such a narrative *Love*, it is indeed a story of love gone toxic through stagnation. Even without the external pressures represented by Calédu and his minions (and the unnamed national power behind them), the stifling world of Haitian gentility will not permit love to be clearly expressed. (Echoes of this theme are found, for example, in Lyonel Trouillot's novel *Thérèse en mille morceaux*, published in 2000.) Claire's maternal feelings are lavished on a doll, and then, somewhat more fruitfully, on her sister's newborn son. Though finally it is plain that she could succeed where Annette failed in usurping Félicia's role with Jean Luze, Claire lacks the will to

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complete the seduction. "I angrily swallow my hopes and my love. There is nothing but hatred in me.… In every human being there is a blessed soul made miserable by the pursuit of happiness."

In *Anger*, this feeling of living entombment is literalized a step further when a different Haitian family awakes to find men in black hemming in its house with stakes; the stockade cuts the family off from the orchards that are the source of its prosperity and from the tomb of its patriarch, a peasant who claimed the land in question and so began to ascend toward the economic and social status of *milat*. To enhance the tale's archetypal feeling, the narration produces proper names for members of the family only when they leave the household; within it they are simply called "the grandfather," "the father," "the mother," "the invalid" and so on. Including the founder in his tomb, four generations are present: the grandfather, himself a militant patriarch who cherishes the narrative of his father's indomitable conquest of this plot of land; the comparatively ineffectual father, who whiles away his days as a clerk in an aimless bureaucracy; the mother, a latent alcoholic; and an adolescent daughter and two sons, one of them crippled by birth defects. The frustrated love that drives the first novella is here replaced by helpless rage.

Like Claire and her family, the household of *Anger* is under constant, invidious observation by its neighbors, who can see how the stockade and surrounding presence of the men in black (who pass the time by shooting songbirds among the fruit trees) has singled the family out as pariahs. The healthy son breaks with his soccer teammates. The mother secretly empties the rum bottle, only to be denounced by the grandfather. The grandfather is closest to the invalid, for the two of them share a wrathful spirit—where the others sink into mute helplessness, they rage. "If I had legs," the invalid cries, "I would kill them, kill them all." Rejecting the notion of a wheelchair, the grandfather encourages the invalid to crawl with the promise that he may eventually learn to walk. These two plot a violent retribution that involves raising the ancestor from his tomb in the lemon grove ("If even the dead refused to hear God's voice and come to our aid…then what would become of us, my child?"), a scheme that is conceivable within the context of Haitian Vodou; in the end, their corpses are tossed back over the stockade into the house's courtyard by unseen killers.

Meanwhile, the father decides to seek legal redress for the imminent confiscation of the family land. He takes his daughter with him on his mission, for no particular reason except the unspoken (though silently understood by all) intention to offer her as a sexual sacrifice to those who have so suddenly seized power. The unfortunate Rose is claimed by "a small skinny man wearing a black uniform…his bony and disproportionately long hands dangling at the end of his arms like the paws of a gorilla." The Gorilla, as he is henceforth called, is the analog of Calédu in *Love*, but in *Anger* the sexual torture is presented in appallingly explicit detail: "I'll open you up until my entire fist goes in," the Gorilla shouts. He also likes to call Rose a "saint," in order to wring more meaning from violating her. Like Calédu, the Gorilla is driven by class hatred: "do you know what I was before I became this figure of authority?… Yes, my beauty, a beggar, despised, shunned by haughty little saint's faces like yours. And now, spread your legs.… That's it, suffer in silence."

> Duvalierism armed a sector of the most wretched to punish the bourgeoisie for its privileges.

Rose's sacrifice to the Gorilla restores the family to a position of status in the community, though a somewhat different one than before. Their land is returned to them, only to be sold to the same men in black who confiscated it. Aware of the new relationship, the father's acquaintances seek him out to curry favor. Fuming, the healthy son plots to avenge his sister by assassinating the Gorilla, but the knife he throws at his despised enemy bounces harmlessly off an iron rail. Surprisingly, the father manages to have the Gorilla killed by one of his own henchmen, but this maneuver comes too late to rescue Rose or redeem the family.

The mother, when she first sees that the men in black have fenced off the tomb of the patriarch, expresses the fundamental dread: "They will desecrate his grave." It is not so much the tomb that's at stake as the myth wrapped up in it, for the patriarch acquired land and status by working to earn it and also by fighting—eye for eye and tooth for tooth—those who threatened to take it from him. Through mute acceptance of the daughter's sacrifice, the family becomes complicit in desecrating its own honor. Rage, in its impotence, does nothing but gnaw at the family from within (much like the perverted love in Claire's household). Only the invalid and the grandfather command a wrath that can turn outward. But the grandfather expresses it only to a craven friend who comes creeping back once it is clear that the family is no longer persecuted but protected by the dread men in black: "take care lest God's holy fury rise up in me, and get out." In the French original, this "fury" and the "anger" of the title are both represented by the word "*colère*."

In *Madness*, the armed beggars and men in black have evolved into "devils." "You see nothing of them under their uniforms. Headless bodies. Faceless heads in golden helmets.… They are anonymous, like stupidity and meanness." Or so they appear from a peephole in a wall of the miserable shack where the narrator of the third novella has barricaded himself against their onslaught. The protagonist belongs not to the lowest Haitian social class but probably the lowest Vieux-Chauvet's imagination could successfully render. René is the child of a black woman, virtually sold into domestic servitude by her family as a girl and raped by her master ("light-skinned as a white man"), who never acknowledges or supports his son.

Thanks to his late mother's sacrifices, René has education enough to have become a poet, so the siege of the town by the devils (who slay hundreds of people before a nearby church and drop a dead body at the door of the shack) is represented in intensely lyrical prose that sometimes overflows into recitations of verse. Three other indigent poets join him in the shack, where they survive for eight days on nothing but cane rum and a little syrup poured out as an offering to the *loas* of Haitian Vodou. Danticat's introduction finds the situation of these fictional poets to be reminiscent of another group of Haitian writers, *Les Araignées du soir* (Evening Spiders), which continued to meet and work in semi-secrecy during the Duvalierist repression. Marie Vieux-Chauvet was the only woman among *Les Araignées*. Other members included Anthony Phelps, Villard Denis, Serge Legagneur, Roland Morisseau and René Philoctète; many of them were jailed or driven into exile during the Duvalier regime.

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Trapped in close quarters with his poetic comrades, René pines for Cécile, a neighbor girl belonging to the class of Claire and her sisters in the first narrative, whom he has courted with his poems and who may even quietly reciprocate his longing, despite the social gulf between them. Finally he arms himself with rum-fueled firebombs and resolves to break out, repel the devils and save the town and his inamorata.

In both *Love* and *Anger*, a nauseous inner complicity with the outer threat is a recurring motif. The figure of Calédu infects Claire's erotic dreamscape: "The statue, with its enormous phallus stiffened in a voluptuous and painful spasm, was of Calédu. The statue came to life and the phallus wagged feverishly. I threw myself at its feet, submissive and rebellious, hardly daring to look up, my thighs shut tight. I heard cries: 'Kill, kill!'" Rose, in the midst of her victimization, blames herself at least in part for it: "Hell had its eye on us for some time and now we're deep in it.... We must be hated and loved to the same extreme." In *Madness*, the threat is internalized to the point of full-blown paranoid delusion. Once the narrator breaks out of his shack, the devils and their depredations turn out to have been alcohol-driven hallucinations, and the corpse dropped outside the door is revealed to be a dead dog. Still, the authorities who control the town prove themselves fiendish enough, for the narrator and his companions are condemned to summary execution for disturbing the peace, while the unlucky Cécile, entangled as a witness, is hauled off to jail to be gang-raped.

One of the effects of Duvalierism was to turn the old social order upside down, arming a sector of the most wretched to punish the bourgeoisie for its privileges (as well as thoroughly terrorizing everyone else in the country). In each of Vieux-Chauvet's three novellas, there's a supernatural element to the experience of the scourge, and the narratives become shorter, more compressed and more hallucinatory from one to the next, as they sweep from the top of the pre-Duvalier Haitian class structure toward the bottom.

In *Love*, Claire's father (albeit a "white-mulatto") is a Vodou practitioner who uses his status in the religion to gain prestige among the peasants who cultivate coffee on Lion Mountain, the property that is the source of the family's wealth. He raises Claire in the role of a son, expecting her not only to master the peasantry but to be initiated to his own level in Vodou. When Claire refuses the religion, she loses control of her father's vassals, the property is sold off piece by piece and she gradually becomes a virtual prisoner in her house. René, when the devils' assault begins, lays out a crucifix and also a sacrifice to the Vodou *loas*, though he knows that both gestures are empty, since he believes in neither religion and has long since rejected the ancestral Vodou spirits his mother diligently served. In *Anger*, Vieux-Chauvet detaches the idea of ancestor worship from its specific context in Haitian Vodou and presents it in more classical, almost Greco-Roman terms; the primal threat in this middle narrative is the desecration of the patriarch's tomb, the mother's deep fear: "They will dig up his bones."

The reader is thus reminded that ancestor worship is by no means unique to the African root-stock, and not to be dismissed as "primitive." As a rule, the elite class to which Claire, her family and Vieux-Chauvet belong is separated by a generation or more from the Vodou almost universally practiced by everyone else in Haiti, and so regards it with a mixture of contempt and superstitious fear. Vieux-Chauvet portrays this attitude and also pushes through it toward a sense of the real potency of the religion in the culture of the Haitian majority. In each of these narratives there is some sense that the characters are being punished, at least in part, for religious apostasy and abandonment of the old ways.

But the phenomenon Vieux-Chauvet renders cuts deeply across class. The evil genius of Duvalierism was to occupy the consciousness of all citizens, thereby forcing them to collaborate in their own destruction. Thus René, so close to the bottom of the social ladder: "I ran away from responsibilities out of fear of the future and now I may no longer have a future. I am alone, shut up like a rat in his hole, I am gnawing at my solitude with every last tooth." This pervasive sense of entrapment, and the sense of helplessly cooperating in one's own entrapment, is rendered still more lyrically by Claire (in a passage the translators must strive valiantly to capture): "Freedom is an inmost power.... I sometimes feel I have gone off course, standing for years in front of a door that would not open for me and that I was afraid to force.... Oh, what wouldn't I give to seize the essential thread of my thought once and for all!... And here I am, my hands open and more empty than ever." ■

On the Make

by ROBIN EINHORN

Empire of Liberty
A History of the Early Republic, 1789–1815.
By Gordon S. Wood.
Oxford. 778 pp. $35.

The big story of the early American Republic was the advent of a society dominated by "middling" men on the make. Discarding relics of aristocratic privilege, taste and duty that had survived the Revolution, these confident and shamelessly self-interested go-getters embraced a commercialized world of economic growth, technological progress and continuous social and cultural change. The triumph of these middling strivers in the early years of the nineteenth century, decades before Alexis de Tocqueville observed and immortalized them in the 1830s, ennobled the American Revolution by making good on its democratic promise. By 1815 the outcome was "a land of enterprising, optimistic, innovative, and equality-loving Americans."

Heartwarming, isn't it? This is the picture Gordon Wood presents in *Empire of Liberty*, his entry into Oxford University Press's justly prestigious series on the history of the United States. Graceful, fluid and long (it tops out at almost 800 pages), Wood's study offers a comprehensive if not encyclopedic tour through the early Republic. Readers learn a little bit about many things: George Washington's political uses of his regal bearing, Alexander Hamilton's economic thinking, Thomas Jefferson's foreign policies (possibly utopian, definitely disastrous). Wood offers striking details about the Lewis and Clark expedition, John Marshall's defense of Supreme Court autonomy, a "golden age" of evangelical hymn-writing and Benjamin Rush's intellectually ambitious but physically deadly reliance on "bleeding"—removing as many as five of the body's six quarts of blood (Rush thought there were twelve) to treat yellow fever,

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tuberculosis, cancer and mental illness.

Wood, a professor emeritus at Brown University, seems to realize that the happy story he tells about the rise of equality-loving go-getters—a process he calls the "republicanization" of American society—had a dark side. He acknowledges that a dynasty of Virginia slaveholders dominated the government, that the Louisiana Purchase and cotton gin ignited an explosive westward expansion of slavery and that an Indian policy of massacre and expulsion destroyed any hope for a less violent future in the West. Even so, Wood thinks the history of the United States in the era from the adoption of the Constitution to the conclusion of the War of 1812 should be mobilized to instill pride rather than provoke sorrow, to highlight triumphs instead of tragedies. In an opus of book reviews, many published originally in *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Republic* and collected in *The Purpose of the Past* (2008), Wood has been very explicit about the proper role for a historian of the early United States: to empathize with the good intentions and well-meaning gestures of the Founders with a capital F.

But not all the Founders. Instead of showering his empathy indiscriminately, Wood casts his story of egalitarian blossoming in relentlessly partisan terms. For reasons that are not entirely clear, he thinks it makes sense for contemporary Americans to take sides in the fierce partisan struggles of this era—and leaves no doubt about which side we should take. The aristocracy of the past was Federalist, the democracy of the future Republican. Crusty New Englanders held Americans back; gregarious Virginians spurred them forward. Even with the benefit of hindsight, Wood all but endorses the view of the Baptist minister who thought Jefferson's re-election to the presidency in 1804 was a signal of the approaching millennium: "Thomas Jefferson is the angel who poured out his vial upon the river Euphrates, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." Or, in Wood's words: "Despite persistent attempts to discredit his reputation, as long as there is a United States [Jefferson] will remain the supreme spokesman for the nation's noblest ideals and highest aspirations."

What is Wood getting at here? Why does he care if Americans revere Jefferson or not? Aren't there other good candidates for "supreme spokesman" for our ideals, such as, well, Abraham Lincoln? Do we even need a supreme spokesman? The popularity of "founder" biographies in recent years suggests that many Americans think we do need such political heroes. The elevation of John Adams to hero status may be the most interesting aspect of this trend, though it is hard to imagine Adams (or Hamilton or even Washington) displacing Jefferson as an object of veneration, not least because of those thrilling first paragraphs of the Declaration of Independence. In *Empire of Liberty* Wood's reverence for Jefferson doesn't match that of James Parton, whose 1874 Jefferson biography began with this menacing declaration: "If Jefferson was wrong, America is wrong. If America is right, Jefferson was right." In his collection of biographical essays, *Revolutionary Characters* (2006), however, Wood echoes Parton, displaying his contempt for the "present-day academic vilification" that is "defaming" the "elite white males" of American history and "demonizing the founders, especially Jefferson."

To his credit, Wood does not defend Jefferson as a personal role model. Along with most other historians of the early Republic, he has abandoned the Jefferson cult's diehard resistance to the Sally Hemings revelations. There are still a few holdouts—William Hyland, a lawyer, has just published a new brief, *In Defense of Thomas Jefferson: The Sally Hemings Scandal*. Generally, though, this game was up after the 1998 DNA test and, in the same year, Annette Gordon-Reed's evisceration, in *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, of the cult's favoring white over black testimony. Wood agrees that Jefferson kept Hemings "as his concubine" ("the evidence is now overwhelming"). He also admits that Jefferson "was in most respects a typical slaveholder" who sold slaves without regard to their family ties and valued the "profit" he made when the women he owned produced more slaves for his plantation.

Wood's reverence for Jefferson is less personal than political. He can accept some tarnish on the reputation of Jefferson the flawed human being. He can even accept criticisms of Jefferson as a policy-maker. But on Jefferson the politician Wood is unyielding. The significance of this cult of personality, for Wood, lies in how Jefferson inspired his contemporaries and particularly the Northern members of his Republican Party. Jefferson, in other words, matters less than the Jeffersonians. They were the ones who did the "republicanizing," by which Wood sometimes means a straightforward partisan victory ("Republicanize" with a capital R) but always means a replacement of aristocratic forms of government, social relations and cultural expression with democratic alternatives. The republicanized world was less hierarchical and more participatory, less orderly and more entrepreneurial, less traditional and more inventive, less exemplary and more familiar. Jefferson did not fully understand the nineteenth-century world, but "no one had done more to bring it about."

To burnish Jefferson's reputation, Wood casts his opponents as the full-fledged villains of a morality tale. He has some sympathy for Hamilton's handling of the Revolutionary War debt and Marshall's work on the Supreme Court. Hamilton preserved the nation's solvency, while Marshall established the independent judiciary as a defender of minority rights. But siding with Jefferson as much as he does leads Wood to strange judgments about the Federalists. He insists, for example, that they were monarchists. They were not "traditional monarchists," since they opposed monarchy, but because they favored some policies Jefferson called monarchist and because Jefferson and his supporters attacked them by calling them monarchists, Wood agrees that they must have been monarchists of some kind.

The "monarchist" policies at issue included creating a cabinet of the president's advisers, establishing a national bank to promote economic growth and deploying executive patronage to attract party allies. "An aristocratic society, such as that promoted by the Federalists," according to Wood (he tends to use "aristocratic" and "monarchist" interchangeably), "was tied together by patronage and personal connections." But Wood goes on to argue that when Hamilton refused to cash in on his insider knowledge of the government's financial operations, it was because he was an aristocrat (or a monarchist) who clung to "the classical conception of leadership." There is no winning here. If you were a Federalist, you were a monarchist and/or aristocrat—largely because Wood says so.

And Wood says so mainly because Jefferson said so 200 years ago. A remarkably naïve sense of politics pervades *Empire of Liberty*, as if the rhetoric of partisan combat can be taken at face value (on one side, at least) and as if emotional attachments trumped material interests and policies. So if a rich but unpretentious manufacturer resented college-educated lawyers, he inevitably was not only a member of Jefferson's party but also a champion of the interests of the "common people." Worse, if "most American social commenta-

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tors" described the United States in a certain way, that was how the nation actually was. The elementary historical idea that the population of "social commentators" might be biased toward the powerful is simply not part of Wood's repertoire. In his world, the winners are supposed to write the history.

Wood's winners actually win even when they lose. *Empire of Liberty* ends with a bizarre account of the War of 1812. Wood dutifully reports on just how badly James Madison and his administration bungled the war effort, but he then casts this incompetence as a heroic triumph of political principle. Madison, Wood argues, "knowingly accepted the administrative confusion and inefficiencies, the military failures, and the [political] opposition…calm in the conviction that…strong executive leadership could only endanger the principles for which the war was fought." Wood then chides other historians for missing the point. Roughly translated, Wood's argument here seems to be that allowing the British to burn Washington was the glory of Madison's presidency.

Nor does Wood's "republicanized" America include the whole United States. No phrases appear more often in *Empire of Liberty* than "especially in the North" and its close cousins ("at least in the North" and so on). These phrases sometimes appear more than once in a paragraph. There is no point in criticizing Wood for using the term "Americans" to refer only to free white male Americans, since the longer phrase becomes tiresome very quickly. But when Wood uses "Americans" and adds "at least the Northerners among them" every few pages in a lengthy book, he keeps drawing attention to the fact that he is avoiding Southerners—or at least the free white male Southerners among them.

It is not that Wood avoids the South altogether. He devotes one of his nineteen chapters to slavery and the incipient rise of the cotton kingdom. The most important thing about slavery in Wood's story, however, is the way it forced slaveholding revolutionaries, particularly Virginians, to abandon dreams of universal liberty and equality. "Everywhere in the country," he writes with considerable exaggeration, "most of the Revolutionary leaders assumed that slavery was on its last legs and was headed for eventual destruction." But Virginia leaders, starting with Jefferson, were terrified by the Haitian Revolution of the 1790s; the abortive Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800 (a military-style plan to take Richmond); and, most of all, the debates about Missouri statehood, which lasted from 1819 to 1821 and in which Northerners displayed their disgust for slavery. As a result, these Southerners began to defend the institution by thinking up reasons African-Americans were fit for enslavement. In this sense, Wood writes, the antislavery feelings "that arose out of the Revolution inadvertently produced racism in America." This is a dubious claim (racism was hardly new in this period), but it represents Wood's latter-day commitment to the Jeffersonian project of lifting slavery's persistence from sordid cruelty to high tragedy.

Wood advances several other odd arguments about slavery. First, he credits the Revolution with having "created for the first time in American history the cultural atmosphere that made African American slavery abhorrent to many Americans." One problem with this claim is that the most influential abolitionists in this period were Quakers, whose enthusiasm for the Revolution had been minimal. Another is that abolitionism spread more quickly in Britain than in the United States in these years. There were several reasons for this, not least the fact that British slavery was located in the Caribbean sugar colonies instead of in Britain. But of all the occurrences that could have motivated British abolitionists such as Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Clarkson, Hannah More and William Wilberforce, nobody would stress the American Revolution. In Britain, a robust abolitionist movement instigated massive sugar boycotts in the 1790s and provided the context for the famous medallion fashioned by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787 of a kneeling slave, dressed in a loincloth and chained at the wrists and ankles, asking, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" In the United States, meanwhile, a comparatively anemic movement had produced little more than a handful of genteel manumission societies and a gradual abolition law in Pennsylvania (but not New York or New Jersey). Britain did not abolish slavery until 1833. Everyone knows what it took to abolish slavery in the United States.

Wood makes an intriguing and clearly accurate observation about the slave trade debates of the early Republic. The Philadelphia convention that framed the Constitution in 1787 and then the first Congress, in 1790, struggled with the problem of whether to ban the importation of slaves into the United States. The convention added to the Constitution the clause barring Congress from acting until 1808, and the first Congress shelved a demand to act earlier. Historians have been puzzled by the behavior of

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the Virginians in these debates, since they condemned the slave trade vociferously while also making sure to defend slavery. Some historians have accepted the rhetoric as genuinely antislavery and therefore as evidence that leading Virginians intended to abolish the institution. Others have called it hypocrisy, since an end of importation would raise the prices of the slaves the Virginians already owned. This was the position of the South Carolinians, who attacked the Virginians for scoring cheap moral points with Northerners while defending their economic interests.

By agreeing that the Virginians' antislavery rhetoric was hypocritical while emphasizing its impact on Northerners, Wood shines new light on this episode. The significance of the slave trade debates, he argues, lies in how the Virginians "confused many Northerners about the real intentions of the Upper South." Fooled into thinking that Virginia was close to abolishing slavery, an action that would have influenced neighboring states, Northerners agreed to muffle antislavery agitation so the Virginia leaders could act without seeming to bow to outside pressure. But the Virginians had no intention of abolishing slavery. The South Carolinians had it exactly right: slave trade abolition would be a boon for Upper South slaveholders, bolstering the domestic slave trade in which Virginians and their neighbors sold and moved a million slaves to the cotton kingdom. The problem here is that Wood cannot have it both ways. Either, as this story suggests, Virginians acted the part of proslavery hypocrites from the beginning, fooling antislavery Northerners into backing off, or they had genuinely antislavery aspirations that they abandoned in the wake of Haiti, Gabriel's Rebellion and the Missouri debates.

Finally, Wood demonstrates how slavery undermined equality and democracy even for white men in the South, aside from its oppression of African-Americans. He agrees with the many historians who have explored how "the master-slave relationship supplied the standard for all other social relationships" in the South. He also describes the peculiarly undemocratic state and local government arrangements that shielded the wealth and power of slaveholders within Southern states. But after noting that Southerners, including the most aristocratic slaveholders, became Jeffersonian Republicans in overwhelming numbers, Wood offers no explanation for the contradiction. Why did elite Southerners join the party bent on "republicanizing" American life? One might take the Southern participation in (really, the Southern leadership of) the Jeffersonian Republicans as evidence that the party was not very egalitarian. Wood, however, does not even acknowledge that there was a contradiction. His Jeffersonians were the Northern foot soldiers, the champions of equality who battled their local Federalist elites—with their Southern leaders somehow along for the ride.

But the most misleading aspect of Wood's treatment of slavery is the way he crams it into one chapter, quarantined from other subjects. This organizational device allows him to tell his other stories as if slavery had nothing to do with them. The fact that Southerners dominated national politics throughout the period he describes—Virginia was still the largest state in 1810 and the second-largest in 1820—recedes from view as Wood celebrates democratization in the United States, "especially in the North."

Nor is slavery the only subject Wood slights. Although his footnotes cite scholarship that dates principally from the past decade, he has remarkably little to say about the major subjects of many of the works he cites. Slavery is one example. Indians and women are two others. Although I may have missed something, I think the only time Wood quotes an Indian is in an account of the lopsided battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, where Andrew Jackson defeated the Red Stick Creeks in what would become Alabama. "My people are no more," Chief Red Eagle declared on a plain littered with the bleaching bones of his warriors. Having an Indian announce his people's departure, of course, is the most traditional way of writing Indians out of American history.

Wood has little more to say about women. It is understandable that women are not the stars of a story concentrating on electoral politics, legislative maneuvering and policymaking. But when Wood describes the formation of a large array of philanthropic societies, we might expect him to notice that women were quite prominent in this field. But, no, the women in this story are overwhelmingly the objects of philanthropic attention—widows and prostitutes in particular. An exception is an anecdote about women who form a "Cent Institution," dropping pennies into "mite boxes" to finance the distribution of religious literature. Wood does note developments in family relations that gave wives "a new sense of themselves as independent persons" (or, more likely, gave some husbands a sense of their wives as independent persons), but when he finally mentions "feminists," he quotes only two men as examples.

The reason women play such a small role in Wood's philanthropy story may be that he uses it, as he uses most other subjects, as evidence for his "republicanization" thesis. In a chapter called "Republican Reforms," Americans (yes, especially in the North) were "reforming and republicanizing their society and culture" by establishing schools, benevolent associations, Masonic lodges, missionary societies and penitentiaries. These institutions, according to Wood, "were important for creating a civic society and making people more compassionate and republican." People? The explanation may be that women were more likely to democratize than republicanize (the latter being a more forthrightly masculine project), though women do neither in *Empire of Liberty*.

Then there is Wood's troubling identification of equality with capitalism. He made this rather strange argument more than a decade ago in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, managing to empty both radicalism and the American Revolution of their radical content. Here, Wood continues to defend the idea of capitalism as promoting not only freedom but also social equality. Wealth, he explains, "is the least humiliating means by which one person can claim superiority over another; and it is the one most easily matched or overcome by exertion." Wood celebrates the proliferation of competitive hustling in all fields of life. Only irredeemable elitists—"New England Federalists and visiting foreigners"—found it unappetizing to watch sporting matches in which men tried "to tear out each other's testicles." We are not told if women enjoyed these "rough-and-tumble" entertainments.

If Jefferson had known nearly as much about his society as Wood does, *Empire of Liberty* is the book he would have written. It is no coincidence that the title is Jefferson's, a phrase encapsulating his brand of velvet-gloved imperialism. Wood seems to know that there was an iron fist lurking inside, but he identifies with an audience that treasures the national fantasy of egalitarian triumph that Jefferson represents. Like Jefferson, Wood nods to the evil of slavery and the violence of westward expansion. Unlike Jefferson, he realizes that there was something undesirable about the way men treated women. But Wood's focus remains squarely on the subculture of white men—especially in the North—who energetically pursued their liberty and happiness in the "republicanized" world of postrevolutionary America. ■

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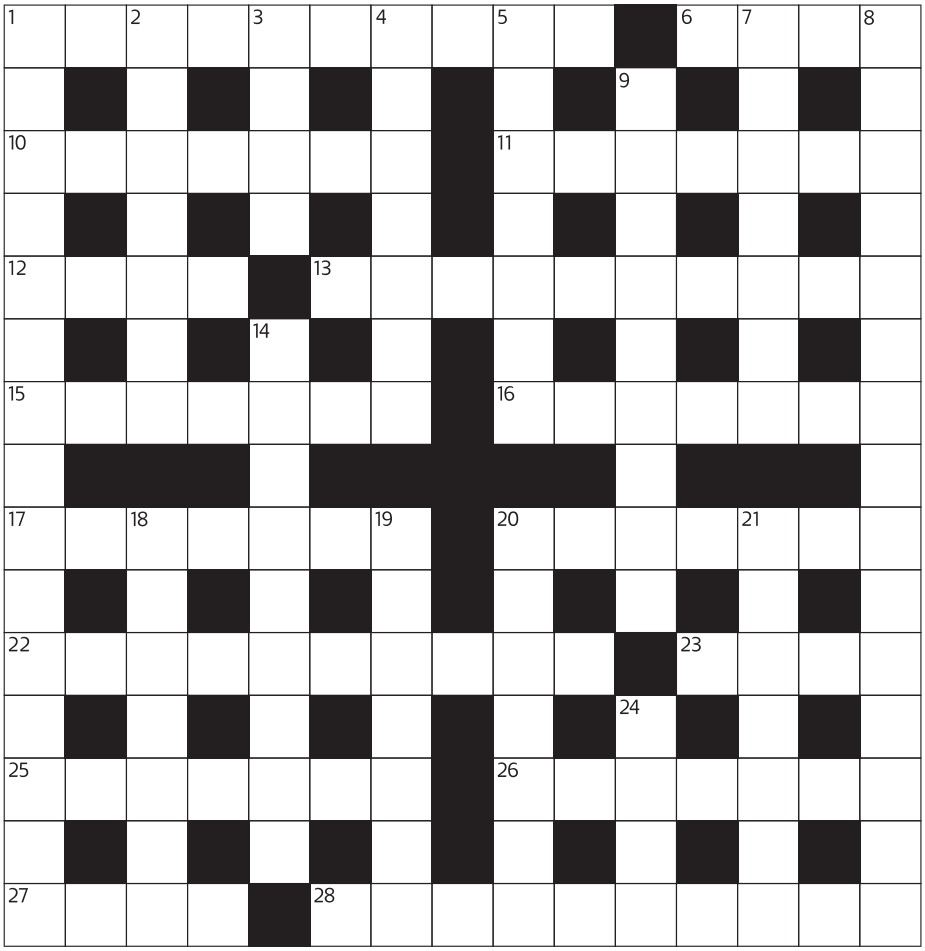

ACROSS

1 What chairmen sometimes do together? They tell what time the stars should appear. (10)

6 Giants' first base, in trying to rise. (4)

10 Noticed one animal where it might be a job to cut a cord. (7)

11 It's necessary no longer to have one man, commonly. (7)

12 Gave a false impression about part of the concert? (4)

13 Robin (Hood) or Guy (Lombardo)? (10)

15 Intermit. (7)

16 The cold wind lets the young horses leave and waste away. (7)

17 Gives the horse-laugh to those who scratch? (7)

20 One probably shouldn't leave the dock in doing so (at least if one is the thinning type). (7)

22 Salome wasn't the type Hemingway might have hired! (4,6)

23 Irish yarn-spinner? (4)

25 Horatio's country? If so, there should be a success story. (7)

26 Such a reminder should cause apparent amusement. (7)

27 Plant speed-up? (4)

28 Not really the lead article of the editor—it's more what he does. (4-6)

DOWN

1 A flight of rooks? (7,2,3,3)

2 In case of some difficulty, they should have more than a brief acquaintance. (7)

3 It's not quite irrational to expect champagne to be so dry. (4)

4 Grace should never be so. (7)

5 Was in apprehension of being both "red" and "dead"? (7)

7 Went over the limit. (7)

8 Proving any orange letter might be official! (8-7)

9 One-time chatty places in high circles. (9)

14 One doesn't so forget about arms, for example. (9)

18 Makes one attack on the costs of explosives? (7)

19 Water container. (3,4)

20 Is the object to hold with a pin? (7)

21 Like Tennyson's work, as far as royalty is concerned. (7)

24 Having trouble being reached when there's no sign of trouble? (4)

This puzzle originally appeared in the January 19, 1963, issue.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 653

N	O	R	T	H	E	R	N	L	I	G	H	T	S	
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Understanding Your Body: What Pathology Reveals About Good Health

Learn How to Know Your Body in 24 Eye-opening Lectures

Your body is a fortress under constant assault. Infectious diseases, parasites, environmental toxins, physical trauma, allergens, and natural disasters are some external enemies it faces. Inside, it is threatened by occasional overzealous allergic, immune, and inflammatory responses, as well as by the cellular mutations that produce cancer.

Fortunately, the body's defenses are remarkably successful, and most of the time we are unaware of the intense drama taking place within our cells and organs.

The intriguing details of this drama make up the field of pathophysiology—the study of the disruptions in a normal body's functions that are caused by disease or injury. Medical students get exhaustive early training in this subject, and the best clinicians are masters of it. Yet few laypeople understand the story of how our bodies fail and the marvelous ways they heal themselves.

The Human Body: How We Fail, How We Heal is designed to fill this information gap. In 24 half-hour lectures, you will explore the many ways the body meets the challenges of disease and injury with remarkable defenses and restorative powers, and how, in some cases, it may either fail or overreact.

Your guide is Dr. Anthony A. Goodman, surgeon, professor, novelist, and a superb communicator of medical information. Dr. Goodman presents a systematic survey of what can go wrong, why, and how the body itself responds, as well as what doctors can do to intervene. There is no better demonstration of the wondrous intricacies of the body and the everyday miracle of good health.

Dr. Goodman's goal is to give you the tools to understand diseases and injuries and the body's reaction to them. Such knowledge is no substitute for seeing your physician; however, now you will be better able to communicate with your doctor, know what questions to ask, and have more clarity regarding your own illness or that of a loved one.

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Infectious diseases are persistent perils.

About Your Professor

Professor Anthony A. Goodman is is Adjunct Professor of Medicine at Montana State University and Affiliate Professor in the Department of Biological Structure at the University of Washington School of Medicine. He received his B.A. from Harvard College and his M.D. from Cornell Medical College.

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